

# emagazine

Issue 100 • April 2023

THE MAGAZINE FOR ADVANCED LEVEL ENGLISH



- *Reading Around Romanticism and Romantic Poetry*
- *Metaphors of the Digital Age – Pioneering or Imprisoning?*
- *The Prohibition of Language in Dystopia*
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#### About us

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Leonie Elliott, David Webber, Sandra James-Young, Falo Wilson and Silliot Barnes-Worrell in *Small Island* by Andrea Levy adapted by Helen Edmunson, National Theatre, 2022. d. Rufus Norris. Photo credit Johan Persson, with permission of the National Theatre

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### emagplus

- Barbara Bleiman: What is Literary about Literary Non-fiction?
- Angus Gordon: The Question of Difficulty or Accessibility in Literary Texts – Geoffrey Hill's *Scenes from Comus* & Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*
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# emagazine Close Reading Competition

# 2023

## How to Enter the Competition

**Write a 500-word close reading of this passage, the opening of Richard Ford's novel *Canada*.**

**Complete your details and submit your entry at:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/CRcomp23>**

## Timeframe

- Competition launches online Wednesday 29th March
- Competition closes 5pm Wednesday 3rd May
- Results posted online: Wednesday 14th June
- Winner published in September issue of *emagazine*.

Our annual Close Reading Competition gives you the chance to show off how much you've learned about reading and commenting insightfully on literary texts. There are great cash prizes but, perhaps more importantly, the winner has the opportunity to be published in *emagazine* – something to be proud of, and an achievement you can talk about in your university statement or put on your CV. We hope to have lots of entries!

## Judges

The *emagazine* editors will shortlist entries.

**The shortlist will be read and judged by Elleke Boehme, Professor of World Literature in English at the University of Oxford, who will decide on a winner and runners up.**

## Prizes

- Winner: £200 and publication in *emagazine*
- Runners-up: £50 and publication online

## emagArchive

- *emagazine* Close Reading Competition 2021 – Results, *emagazine* 93, September 2021
- *emagazine* Close Reading Competition 2015, *emagplus* for *emagazine* 68, April 2015
- Close Reading Competition 2016 – Results and Comments, *emagazine* 72, April 2016
- Close Reading Competition 2018 – Commentary and Winning Entry, *emagazine* 81, September 2018
- Close Reading Competition 2018 – Runners-up, *emagplus* for *emagazine* 81, September 2018
- *emagazine* Close Reading Competition 2019 – Results and Report, *emagazine* 85, September 2019
- *emagazine* Close Reading Competition 2020 – Winning Entry, *emagazine* 80, September 2020
- Barbara Bleiman: Using Terminology (or Not) to Write About Texts, *emagplus* for *emagazine* 85, September 2019
- *emagazine* Close Reading Competition 2021, *emagazine* 91, February 2021

**Do take a look at the previous winners on the *emagazine* website [here](#), to get a sense of how others have approached the competition and stood out from the crowd!**



## The Opening of *Canada* – Richard Ford

First, I'll tell about the robbery our parents committed. Then about the murders, which happened later. The robbery is the more important part, since it served to set my and my sister's lives on the courses they eventually followed. Nothing would make complete sense without that being told first.

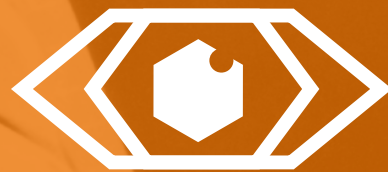
Our parents were the least likely two people in the world to rob a bank. They weren't strange people, not obviously criminals. No one would've thought they were destined to end up the way they did. They were just regular – although, of course, that kind of thinking became null and void the moment they did rob a bank.

MY FATHER, Bev Parsons, was a country boy born in Marengo County, Alabama, in 1923, and came out of high school in 1939, burning to be in the Army Air Corps – the branch that became the Air Force. He went in at Demopolis, trained at Randolph, near San Antonio, longed to be a fighter pilot, but lacked the aptitude and so learned bombardiering instead. He flew the B-25s, the light-medium Mitchells, that were seeing duty in the Philippines, and later over Osaka, where they rained destruction on the earth – both on the enemy and undeserving people alike. He was a tall, winning, smiling handsome six-footer (he barely fitted into his bombardier's compartment), with a big square, expectant face and knobby cheekbones and sensuous lips and long, attractive feminine eyelashes. He had white shiny teeth and short black hair he was proud of – as he was of his name. Bev. Captain Bev Parsons. He never conceded that Beverley was a woman's name in most people's minds. It grew from Anglo-Saxon roots,' he said. 'It's a common name in England. Vivian, Gwen and Shirley are men's names there. No one confuses *them* with women.' He was a nonstop talker, was open-minded for a southerner, had graceful obliging manners that should've taken him far in the Air Force, but didn't. His quick hazel eyes would search around any room he was in, finding someone to pay attention to him – my sister and me, ordinarily. He told corny jokes in a southern theatrical style, could do card tricks and magic tricks, could detach his thumb and replace it, make a handkerchief disappear and come back. He could play boogie-woogie piano, and sometimes would 'talk Dixie' to us, and sometimes like Amos 'n' Andy. He had lost some of his hearing by flying the Mitchells, and was sensitive about it. But he looked sharp in his 'honest' GI haircut and blue captain's tunic and generally conveyed a warmth that was genuine and made my twin sister and me love him. It was also probably the reason my mother had been attracted to him (though they couldn't have been more unsuited and different) and unluckily gotten pregnant from their one hasty encounter after meeting at a party honoring returned airmen, near where he was re-training to learn supply-officer duties at Fort Lewis, in March 1945 – when no one needed him to drop bombs anymore. They were married immediately when they found out. Her parents, who lived in Tacoma and were Jewish immigrants from Poland, didn't approve. They were educated mathematics teachers and semiprofessional musicians and popular concertizers in Poznan who'd escaped after 1918 and come to Washington State through Canada, and became – of all things – school custodians. Being Jews meant little to them by then, or to our mother – just an old, exacting, constricted conception of life they were happy to put behind them in a land where there apparently were no Jews.

But for their only daughter to marry a smiling, talkative only-son of Scotch-Irish Alabama backwoods timber estimators was never in their thinking, and they soon put it out of their thinking altogether. And while, from a distance, it may seem that our parents were merely not made for one another, it was more true that when our mother married our father, it betokened a loss, and her life changed forever – and not in a good way – as she surely must've believed.

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# Nineteen Eighty-Four



Andrew McCallum draws on the discipline of cognitive literary studies to reveal how Orwell's iconic work is a novel that encourages readers to think about thinking itself, as well as entering the minds of others. Might it make you think differently about the text?





Big Brother Is Watching, 1984, 1986  
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Big Brother Is Watching, 1984, 1956  
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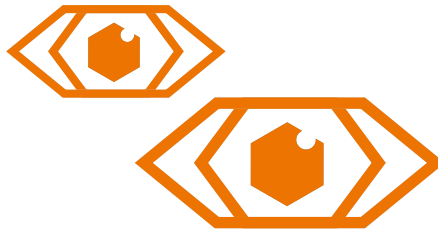
Cognitive literary studies is a relatively new and growing field that explores the relationship between literature and cognition (the mental process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses). Its exponents argue that studying literature offers insight into the way the mind operates; simultaneously, bringing an understanding of how the mind works to our reading helps us develop a greater understanding of what literature is and why it is such a special and important cultural form.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is particularly interesting to study through a cognitive lens because, in large part, it is itself about the human mind: attempts to contain it and the struggle to break free from the very notion of 'thoughtcrime'. The novel's links to cognition spread much wider, though, than simple thematic ones. It throws light in all kinds of ways on how humans think with, through and in literature.

Indeed, *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* relationship to cognition itself might go some way to explaining its enduring appeal. It's all too easy to see its popularity as lying primarily in its blunt warning against totalitarian rule. But such a warning could easily be made in just a few lines as part of a political treatise. The novel must be operating in some other way, working as literature on our thoughts, experiences and senses.

## Counterfactuality

Key to human cognition is the ability to imagine. This includes imagining what has not happened, or is not the case, what is known as **counterfactual thinking**. Counterfactual thinking allows us to challenge the world as it is, and so make technological, cultural and social



developments. It is also the means by which we can test the value of what we already have. Are the current ways of doing things better or worse than an imagined alternative?

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* takes this imagined alternative to its limit by creating a world in which people are governed by a set of principles that are the absolute opposite of what they know to be the case: War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; Ignorance is Strength; Two and Two Makes Five. In being presented with this world readers can experience the imaginative thrill of such counterfactual extremes, while being able to reflect on the levels to which they are free to act and think in their own world.

## Theory of Mind

Another important imaginative act is the ability to, metaphorically, enter into someone else's mind, to think as others think. Cognitive scientists call this **theory of mind** and use it to explain how and why humans are empathetic towards one another.

Literature is a form that requires readers to enter into the minds of others. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we step into Winston Smith's mind. In doing so, we experience what he is thinking and feeling when he starts his diary, or when he is rewriting documents inside the Ministry of Truth, or trying to work out whether or not he should trust

O'Brien. We live through the thrill of his love affair with Julia and the terror of the torture he endures in the second half of the novel. Entering his mind helps readers recalibrate their experience of the world of Big Brother: his rational liberalism provides a familiar perspective, balancing out the novel's multiple counterfactual dystopian elements.

Significantly, readers enter into the mind of an individual who is under immense pressure not to think in the way that he does. Consequently, this is a novel that encourages readers to think about thinking: the limits of individual thought, the possibility of suppressing our thoughts, the control the state has over our thinking. We also get to contemplate the horror of having our thoughts crushed when presented with the mentally broken Winston at the end of the novel. Could this ever happen to us? Could we be broken in the same way? Would we even try to resist?

## Underspecification

*Nineteen Eighty-Four's* narrative never tells us explicitly what Winston is thinking. We have to infer this from his actions and experiences. The novel, then, very much replicates the real-life process of getting inside someone else's mind. We cannot literally know what someone else is thinking, but we can make a good guess based on their actions and experiences. Cognitive approaches to literature call this gap between what we are explicitly told and what we have to infer **underspecification**. As humans, we spend our lives immersed in **underspecification**, working things out based on the limited available evidence.

Not being told Winston's thoughts directly, means that the process of reading the novel





Big Brother is Watching, 1984, 1956  
Contributor: Alistair Picture Library Limited. / Alamy Stock Photo

comes close to replicating the process of reading the mind of someone in real life: we must employ empathy to imagine what he is feeling as he seeks to assert his own identity.

## Embodied Cognition

Cognitive scientists resist any artificial separation of the mind and the body, instead seeing the two as intertwined in a process of **embodied cognition**: how our bodies experience the world affects the way that we think; how we think has consequences for how we act. It's worth re-reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with this in mind. We might never be told explicitly what Winston is thinking, but we are given multiple details about his physical environment, each of which adds to our ability to get inside his mind. Small physical details, such as the smell of boiled cabbage that permeates the novel, or the dust that coats so many surfaces [see *emagazine* 83], align the reader's cognitive senses in mundane but effective ways with Winston's world. We also get to link changes in his state of mind to different geographical locations, in effect moving around with him. For example, we feel his anxiety when he avoids the telescreen in his flat; we share his exhilaration in meeting Julia above Charrington's shop; and we experience his sense of daring, mingled with jeopardy, when he declares his support for the Brotherhood in O'Brien's flat. Most of all, we get to live through the torture he endures for so long in the Ministry of Love.

Tellingly the torture only draws to a close, Winston's resistance finally shattered, when O'Brien invokes an image that combines the physical and the mental in a single, nightmarish statement. He says,

*'If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.'*

This is embodied cognition in action: it is not the boot itself that breaks Winston, but its imagined projection. Winston and reader at this point become one, each thinking about and feeling the same horrific act, contemplating the (counterfactual) reality of a boot stamping on a face forever.

## Conclusions

Cognitive literary studies is a complex field, not least because real expertise requires a strong knowledge of cognitive science. Grappling with some of its basic tenets, though, such as those laid out here, can offer some new and exciting ways of looking at literature of all kinds. At the very least it should encourage us to think deeply about what happens inside our own minds when we read a literary work, and about what such a work can tell us about cognition itself. It certainly developed my own understanding of the relevance, appeal and sophistication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Andrew McCallum is Director of the English and Media Centre.

## Further Reading

- Cave, T. (2018). *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism*. Oxford University Press

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- Narrative Structure and Point of View in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *emagazine* 88, April 2020
- Touching Wood – Reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 2003, *emagazine* 21, September 2003
- Dystopia and the Language of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *emagplus* for *emagazine* 74, December 2016
- Dystopian Dust – A Mote to Trouble the Mind's Eye, *emagazine* 83, February 2019
- What's the Problem With *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?, *emagplus* for *emagazine* 75, February 2017
- Trauma and Emotion – *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a Psychological Novel, *emagazine* 80, April 2018
- A Message-transmission System – Documents in Dystopian Fiction, *emagazine* 85, September 2019
- Ordinary, Average, Cowardly? The Everyman Archetype in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *emagazine* 78, December 2017
- Casting Shadows Over Our Future – the Dystopian Novel, *emagplus* for *emagazine* 46, December 2009
- Dystopia – An Overview, *emagazine* 60, April 2013

# How Language Play Supports Acquisition

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Clare Mellor draws on research in CLA to show how the playful language of nursery rhymes, bouncing games and children's books are all of great value in the development of children's talk and their later reading too.

When adults are interacting with children, they often engage in what Laura Hahn (2022) refers to as 'language play':

Parents and caregivers all over the world make use of language play in the form of songs, nursery rhymes, bouncing games and finger plays<sup>1</sup>

Hahn cites research into the socio-cultural and emotional benefits of nursery rhymes and songs which can

soothe or stimulate the infant and [...] strengthen the bond between caregiver and infant.

And yet, Hahn observes, the function of such rhymes and songs, goes beyond the social and emotional:

songs often contain language in the song lyrics and thereby entail the possibility of language learning for the infant listener.

By singing to our children, we are also exposing them to language in a way that is especially likely to help them learn more about it.

## Rhythmic Patterns

Research into early language acquisition has found that the noises infants make during the babbling phase reflect the rhythmic patterns of their native language (de Boysson-Bardies B, Sagart L, Durand C., 1984). This suggests that these rhythmic patterns are very important. Even before they are able to produce recognisable words, infants are vocalising the rhythm of their native language.

In nursery rhymes and songs, these rhythms are often very obvious and exaggerated,

accompanied by repetition, alliteration, rhyme and assonance.

Here is one example:

Engine, engine coloured black  
Going slowly down the track  
Engine, engine coloured green  
Fastest train I've ever seen!

The caregiver bounces the child on their knee in time to the trochaic rhythm; the first verse is recited slowly, with the second verse getting faster and faster whilst maintaining the trochaic beat, often accompanied by much laughter and giggling. The nature of the game means that the rhythm of the language becomes a physical as well as an auditory experience.

## Rhyming Stories

In my own experiences of parenting, song, rhythm and rhyme have all played a significant role, particularly when my children were younger.

Take a look at this short transcript of me reading with my youngest daughter, then aged two:

Mum and Ffion are sitting on the bed looking at the book together. Ffion is helping to turn the pages and pointing at the pictures in the book. Mum pauses in her reading to let Ffion join in with the story.

Mum: (reading) Each Peach Pear Plum  
Ffion: I /b ai/ peach /p Λ m/  
Mum: (reading) I spy Tom Thumb ||  
Ffion: (pointing) || /æ b l /

Mum: apples (.) do you think they're apples (.) or plums (1) or peaches

Ffion: /æ b l /

Mum: you think they're apples

Ffion: /j Λ z / (yes)

Mum: who's that

Ffion: /w/abbit

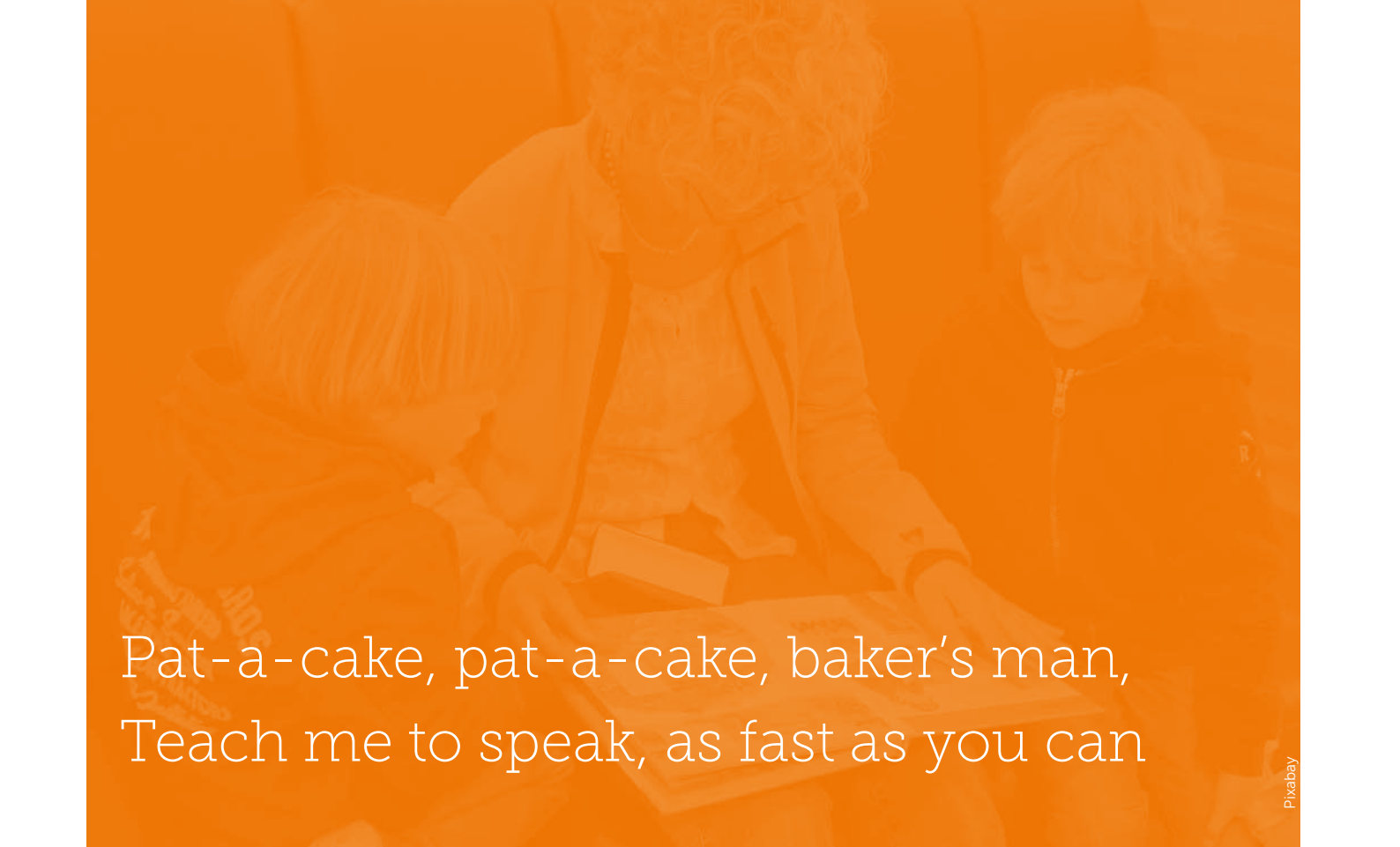
Mum: a rabbit (.) that's right (.) (reading) Tom Thumb in the

Ffion: /p Λ b Λ d / (cupboard)

The text itself – *Each Peach Pear Plum* by Janet and Allen Ahlberg (1978) – is written in rhyming couplets. This encourages children to join in with the story, helping them to predict (or, on a re-reading, to remember) the next word in the story.

Early in the transcript, Ffion attempts to complete a rhyming couplet ('Each Peach Pear Plum/I spy Tom Thumb') using the phonological features to help her. Although she does not get the right words, instead repeating nouns from the initial line: 'I /b ai/ peach /p Λ m/', Ffion's utterance shows awareness of the rhyming and rhythmic patterns in the story. The repetition of 'I spy' (which occurs throughout the story) and the rhyming structure prompt her to join in.

Later, Ffion correctly interjects with the noun 'cupboard', completing the phrase 'Tom Thumb in the cupboard'. Although she struggles with the pronunciation, assimilating the /p/ and /b/ phonemes in place of the initial /k/ sound, her interjection includes the correct number of syllables, showing an awareness of the text's rhythmic pattern.



# Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man, Teach me to speak, as fast as you can

Pixabay

A later section of the transcript shows how Ffion benefits from the syllable patterns in *Each Peach Pear Plum*:

Mum: (reading) Mother Hubbard down  
the cellar (1) I spy

Ffion: /ɪ d A e l ə / (Cinderella)

Although she deletes the fricative /s/ at the beginning of 'Cinderella' (a phoneme which is usually acquired, according to Pamela Grunwell (1987), at around 36 months), Ffion is able to match the final phonemes in 'down the cellar' and 'Cinderella', showing a phonological awareness which could theoretically be applied to other sounds, words and situations.

## Nursery Rhymes and Language Development

In the U.K., a number of organisations promote the benefits of rhymes and songs for young children. World Nursery Rhyme Week takes place annually and the charity BookTrust promotes the sharing of rhymes on its website:

Sharing rhymes with very young children helps them become familiar with the patterns of language and helps them develop their understanding of how language works.<sup>2</sup>

Laura Hahn's research into how infants respond to rhymes focuses on neural responses to sound. She suggests that the phonological patterns in nursery rhymes

help infants to identify a structure in the sounds they are hearing. This awareness of rhythm is a key part of language acquisition, and, Hahn claims, can have a positive impact on future language development:

Infants' neural tracking of the syllable rhythm in nursery rhymes [...] is positively correlated with future vocabulary (18 months).

Hahn's research suggests that listening to nursery rhymes gives children an advantage in being able to recognise patterns in language which can help with later language development, specifically vocabulary acquisition.

## From Nursery Rhymes to Reading

But it is not just spoken language that can benefit from early exposure to nursery rhymes. Research by Bryant, Bradley and MacLean (1989) found:

knowledge of nursery rhymes enhances children's phonological sensitivity which in turn helps them to learn to read.<sup>3</sup>

By looking at longitudinal data from 64 children the researchers observed:

There is a strong relation between early knowledge of nursery rhymes and success in reading and spelling over the next three years

The linguists proposed that the phonological skills acquired through familiarity with nursery rhymes led to greater success in reading and spelling, arguing that nursery rhymes increase a child's 'sensitivity' to rhyme and alliteration, allowing them to:

recognise at some level (though not necessarily explicitly) that different words and different syllables have a segment of sound in common. *Cat* and *hat*, for example, rhyme because they share the common sound at.

So just as Ffion is able to recognise the rhyming sounds in 'Cinderella' and 'cellar' in her bedtime story, so too do nursery rhymes help children to recognise these links between words.

Laurie J. Harper's 2011 quantitative research study also supports these findings, arguing that:

The use of nursery rhymes with young children promotes positive attitudes toward language learning and helps children to build awareness of sound patterns of language.<sup>4</sup>

By reciting nursery rhymes, adults are doing more than just distracting children when they are bored or entertaining them on a car journey – they are introducing them to some of the key phonological aspects of the English language.

## Rhythm and Music

Bhide, Power and Goswami's 2013 case study of nineteen 6-7 year olds looked specifically at the impact of rhythm on language development. Their results found a positive correlation between improved 'rhythmic entrainment' (the ability of children to match a rhythm) and improved reading scores:

musical intervention based on rhythm and on linking metrical structure in music and language can have benefits for the development of literacy and phonological awareness.<sup>5</sup>

So, a focus on developing rhythmic skills led to progress in reading, because rhythm is an important phonological component of language.

## Cognitive Responses to Language

Usha Goswami is a Professor of Cognitive Developmental Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge. Her 2022 research focuses on how the brain processes language:

Knee-bouncing games with infants, nursery rhymes and playground clapping games all depend on the integration of repetitive language and repetitive rhythm. [...] these nursery routines may provide 'supranormal' stimuli that support language learning by the human brain.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, 'Engine, engine' is not just a fun rhyme, it is helping to stimulate the parts of the brain that match speech signals. Goswami identifies similarities between the phonological features present in lullabies and nursery rhymes and those present in infant-directed speech (IDS). In a 2019 interview, Goswami explains that in her view, we should all be using IDS when we talk to babies because it gives the brain

the building blocks it needs to set up the spoken language system.<sup>7</sup>

Both IDS and nursery rhymes can stimulate the infant brain and help develop an understanding of the rhythmic patterns of language.

It is Goswami's belief that ludic language is of great benefit to young children. In an interview in the *TES* (2019) she describes nursery rhymes as

the perfect rhythmic template for the developing brain.

She explains:

the developing brain is working out how to predict what's coming next in speech and it does this through predicting where stressed syllables are going to be. That system will eventually be able to deal with the natural way that people speak (which is not rhythmically regular), but researchers hypothesise that, at the beginning, the brain needs everything to be as exaggerated as possible.<sup>8</sup>

So listening to phonologically exaggerated language – like IDS and nursery rhymes – can help young children familiarise themselves with the phonological structures of language.

## Conclusion

Recognising the important role that rhythm plays in language acquisition can help all children on their language journey. So whether it's singing 'Humpty Dumpty', clapping along to 'Concentration 64' or chanting 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt', these rhythms and rhymes could be supporting the language development of the next generation.

Clare Mellor is a former Head of English.

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Helena Bonham-Carter  
and Julian Sands *A Room  
with a View*, c. 1985  
Contributor: Colaimages /  
Alamy Stock Photo

# Music and Muddle

## The 'undeveloped heart' of Lucy Honeychurch

John Hathaway explores two important motifs in *A Room with a View* that show the protagonist's progress from bewildering uncertainty to a life with passion and meaning.

As a member of the free-thinking Bloomsbury Group of the early 20th century, Forster writes of the dangers of the 'undeveloped heart' of the English, and it is plain to see that the characters in his novels often struggle with this 'undeveloped heart': they live their lives following the dictates of Victorian society and as a result, suppress their own thoughts and feelings. To Forster's mind, such a 'life' is not, actually, life at all, and the powerful metaphor of 'marching with the armies of darkness' that Forster employs to describe Lucy when she rejects George in England aptly conveys the dangers of possessing such a heart.

Fortunately, however, Forster is not content to leave Lucy in this position, and if *A Room with a View* can be viewed as a bildungsroman, or the coming-of-age of Lucy Honeychurch as a character, it can also be seen as focusing on how to move beyond the customs and mores of our world and embrace our own desires. Two recurrent motifs in the novel, music and 'muddle', track Lucy's progress from being a 'powerless and sexually naive protagonist' in the words of Buzzard, to a character who, to quote Mr Bebe, 'had found wings and meant to use them', culminating in her final flight to Italy with George.

### In Italy

Lucy Honeychurch as a protagonist is unsure of herself and trying to navigate her way through the adult world she occupies, yet often finds bewildering and confusing. She resorts to seeking the guidance of other forms of authority as a compass to direct her. Frequently, she expresses how unsure she feels to be deprived of such guidance: the omniscient narrator tells us that

*It was too dreadful not to know whether she was thinking right or wrong*

and she appeals to others around her, such as Mr Bebe, to know how to respond to characters and situations. For example, she asks Mr Bebe if 'old Mr Emerson' is 'nice or not nice' so as to know how to treat him. Her reliance on her copy of *Baedeker*, the Georgian equivalent of the *Lonely Planet Guides*, is notable here, which explains her sense of panic when she ventures into the unknown Italy with Eleanor Lavish, who refuses to allow Lucy to follow the instructions in this guide book. Lucy constantly defers to the opinions of others rather than trying to work out what she likes and dislikes. Rather plaintively, Lucy comments to her cousin that

*'I don't know what I think, nor what I want'*

and Mr Emerson is right in his assessment of her character when he declares that 'You are inclined to get muddled.' The word 'muddle' or 'muddled' occurs nineteen times in this slim novel, and refers to the state of possessing the 'undeveloped heart' that so preoccupied Forster's thinking.

Yet Forster is very clear about presenting Lucy as a more complex character. It is her playing of the piano that is a key vehicle in this characterisation of her: in direct comparison to her 'muddled' state, we are told that

*Lucy never knew her own desires so clearly as after music*

and that playing the piano allowed her to 'enter a more solid world' where she was

*no longer either deferential or patronising; no longer either a rebel or a slave.*

This suggests that music allows her to escape the mystifying world and, for a blissful period of time, to cease having to define herself in relation to it. In other words, it allows her to simply be. Mr Bebe, who is placed in the novel as the commentator on Lucy's music, makes the psychological importance of her playing clear when he states:

Daniel Day-Lewis in A Room With A View (1985)  
Credit: Merchant Ivory/Goldcrest / Album  
Contributor: Album / Alamy Stock Photo



'If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to life as she plays, it will be very exciting – both for us and for her.'

Music, then, acts as an audible outpouring of Lucy's own tumultuous emotions that she feels she has to distrust and 'stifle' throughout so much of the novel, and it is no wonder that Lucy's mother 'disapprove[s]' of her playing as Lucy is always 'peevisish, unpractical and touchy' afterwards. Lucy's intention to go out unchaperoned after playing is explained away by Mr Bebe as a result of 'too much Beethoven': having occupied a realm where she is free from society's constraints, it is understandable that she finds it hard to re-insert herself into the role of the 'medieval lady', following the strict rules and regulations placed on Georgian women in 1908.

## In England

After Lucy has fled the 'muddle' of what occurs with George in Italy, her engagement to the 'well-appointed' Cecil Vyse represents a further sacrifice to conformity rather than a move towards embracing her own desires. Although Cecil is presented as a comic character in many ways, Forster's choice of surname should signal the restrictions he represents; Lucy is further prevented from exploring her own emotions, caught in a vice, as she settles for a respectable match that is devoid of passion and feeling. Her 'muddled' state is matched by her choice of music in Mrs Vyse's flat, where, in spite of Cecil's protestations that she should play Beethoven, she plays the more measured and less passionate works of Schumann. As she plays,

The sadness of the incomplete [...] throbbed in its dejected phrases

and Forster is quick to juxtapose her playing at this point in the novel with her earlier playing in Italy:

Not thus had she played on the little draped piano at the Bertolini, and 'Too much Schumann' was not the remark that Mr Beebe had passed to himself when he returned.

Lucy deliberately modifies her choice of music and rejects the danger of indulging in Beethoven – a symbol of her repressing her own internal desires and wants. Of course, repression brings its own dangers, and Lucy's later disturbance as she emits 'the cry of a nightmare' that night is surely an unconscious protest against the path that she is following.

If Lucy in Italy is presented, as one contemporary reviewer put it, as 'a girl who cannot understand herself', in England she is definitely presented as a woman who intentionally will not understand herself and does everything she can to ignore her heart's true feelings. 'She never gazed inwards', we are told, and

If at times strange images rose from the depths, she put them down to nerves.

As Forster comments:

Life is easy to chronicle, but bewildering to practise, and we welcome 'nerves' or any other shibboleth that will cloak our personal desire.

It is all too easy for us as dispassionate observers to see the truth of Lucy's love for George, but Forster highlights how easily we all 'welcome' any plausible excuse that will 'cloak' or explain away our own 'personal desire' so we do not have to act on it.

When disaster comes in the form of George's second embrace, Lucy is clear as to how she must respond. 'Lucy had developed', Forster tells us, ironically explaining the verb 'developed' to mean 'she was now better able to stifle the emotions of which the conventions of the world disapprove.' It is key to note that at this point, Forster uses repetition to highlight Lucy's rejection of her own personal desires:

Once more music appeared to her the employment of a child.

This phrase was used after George's first kiss when Lucy surrendered herself into the hands of Charlotte and allowed her to manage the situation. In both cases, Lucy's rejection of music represents her rejection of her own true emotions, and it is this self-deception that allows Lucy to reject George so convincingly, even as he attempts to 'speak out through all this muddle' and appeal to Lucy's genuine feelings.

## 'The holiness of direct desire'

It is only the intervention of Mr Emerson that saves Lucy; it

made her see the whole of everything at once

giving her priceless self-understanding and allowing her to view herself and her

situation differently. It is his words on the danger of 'muddle' that encapsulate the threat of the 'undeveloped heart':

'There's nothing worse than a muddle in all the world... It is on my muddles that I look back with horror – on the things that I might have avoided... beware of muddle.'

Although love can be 'muddle[d]', as he tells Lucy,

'you can never pull it out of you ... love is eternal

and it is this that finally reveals to her the 'holiness of direct desire' and allows her to finally 'live as she plays'. Throughout this novel, dismissed by many as sentimental mawkishness, Forster dangles the terrifying consequences of being unable to untangle the 'muddle' of life, and, as a result, miss out on not only self-understanding but also being able to act on our desires. Lucy, at one point in her final conversation with Mr Emerson, is left to reflect:

Waste! That word seemed to sum up the whole of life ... Was it possible that she had muddled things away?

Forster is directly inviting us to assess and evaluate to what extent our own hearts are 'undeveloped' and gives us a very clear image of where that will take us in the figures of 'frozen' Charlotte Bartlett and Lucy, as she takes her first steps 'marching in the armies of darkness' that threaten to envelop her so quickly. It is by charting Lucy's progress through the motifs of music and 'muddle' that Forster allows us to see just how great is the gap between what we believe we want and what we really want, in order to reveal to us the threat of the 'muddles' in our own lives.

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# Reading around Romanticism and Romantic Poetry – in *emagazine* and beyond

Barbara Bleiman offers some thoughts on finding out more about the broader cultural background to the poems you are studying, without losing sight of the poems themselves.

## Why Read Around?

If you're studying a Romantic poet, or cluster of Romantic poems, you may experience one of two things, or perhaps even both at the same time – feeling that you have a very shaky idea of what Romanticism is and why it's worth knowing about it, or overwhelmed by the vast amount of information and ideas available about it and unsure about how to make use of it. Where should one stop, when there's so much about art, philosophy, political upheavals, literary shifts, all of which might be relevant?

One way of sifting and selecting what's most useful and significant in discussing individual poems or poets is to ask yourself some questions first and see if you can begin to answer them through the reading that you do.

## Start With Some Questions

So here is a list of the kind of things that I might want to know, if I were studying Romantic poetry, that might shape my reading of background material:

1. What made the Romantics special and different?
2. What made their new ways of writing and thinking emerge at that particular period? To what extent was it any of these things:
  - A reaction to political events?
  - A reaction against the conventions in literature in the previous period?
  - New understandings and ideas in philosophy?
  - New thinking about the individual and how the mind works? A reaction against the church and organised religion?
  - A desire for greater personal freedom, the ability to lead a life with less constraints imposed?
  - New ideas about the relationship between men and women?

3. Was it just ideas and themes or also style that broke with tradition?
4. Were they a single group with a shared philosophy or were there differences between poets? Did they see themselves as a movement or group, or is that a view that was generated afterwards, from a distance?
5. Did other art forms – for instance music and visual art – also take a turn towards Romanticism and how might exploring these help one understand more about the same features and preoccupations in poetry?
6. Can I connect up what I'm reading about the context of Romanticism with the specifics of the poetry I'm reading? What fresh insight does it give me into the poems themselves?

## Reading for Interpretation

That last question, number 6, is a really important one for me. It's worth keeping the poems in mind when you're reading about the social, political or literary context, to weigh up how this might influence your interpretation (or not, depending on the poet or poem). For instance, knowing about the political context of revolutions in Europe and laws against sedition might be particularly relevant for some of Blake's poetry – for instance 'London', or Shelley's 'England in 1819' but less so for Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' or his sonnet 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'. Awareness of the new philosophical ideas about the sublime might be more interesting in relation to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' or Wordsworth's 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' than to Blake's 'Holy Thursday' poems or Byron's 'We'll go no more a-roving'. A key idea to hold onto is 'How does knowing this make me read this or that poem differently?'

## Where to Look for Ideas about Romanticism

A brilliant place to start reading about Romanticism is in the *emagazine* archive. There are numerous articles about individual poets but also some broader articles about aspects of Romanticism. They are written with an A Level audience in mind and are fairly short pieces, so you won't have to wade through a lot of difficult, inaccessible material to learn about the context for romanticism or its key ideas. In the right-hand column are some openings of *emagazine* articles that you might want to read.

### Romanticism - A Rough Guide

Rebekah Owens and Andrew Anderson's engaging overview of the period we call Romantic highlights key themes, interests and conventions - and debunks a few myths.

#### The Age of Reason and the Hunger after Truth

Keats's words provide a loose definition of Romanticism. What you have, in essence, is the Age of Reason represented in his phrase 'hunger after truth'. Keats's complaint about the pursuit of knowledge reflects the early eighteenth-century concerns with science, reason, and intellectualism when it was believed that human nature could be subject to scientific analysis. It was thought that laws could be discerned about humanity in much the same way as there were laws of physics, or chemistry. It was a response to human nature that was mechanical and impersonal. The reaction to this, the movement known as Romanticism, is embodied in Keats's idea that an artist should 'delight in sensation'. He considered that the artist should be less concerned with scientific accuracy and should be open to different 'sensations'. In other words, a life of feelings.

Article Written By: Rebekah Owens is a freelance writer with an M.A. from the Shakespeare Institute. Andrew Anderson is a lecturer in English and Creative Writing at Stratford-upon-Avon College. He has an M.A. in Shakespeare Studies from The Shakespeare Institute.

This article first appeared in *emagazine* 62, December 2013.

Print

### Romantic revolution - putting poetry in context

Picture a romantic and it's probably love and flowers that spring to mind. But if it is a Romantic you're conjuring up, it's revolution, rebellion, and radicalism you need to be thinking of. Neil King explains why.

#### When is Romanticism

Does 'Romantic' mean a candlelit dinner for two? That may do for a modern Mills & Boon sense of 'romantic' with a small 'r', but 'Romantic' with a capital 'R' refers to a movement in the arts and ways of thinking which pervaded Europe between about 1780 and 1830. Many elements of Romanticism existed, of course, in the writings of Shakespeare and others who lived much earlier. And as with most historical periods, the movement was defined retrospectively: nobody said on 1st January 1779 'We're now getting into the Romantic Period', or on 31st December 1829, 'Well, that's the end of the Romantics, now we can get on with the Victorians.' The period is loosely defined, and certainly in music lasted through much of the nineteenth century with composers such as Hector Berlioz (1803-69).

Article Written By: Neil King is Head of English and Director of Sixth Form at Hymers College, Hull. He is author and editor of *The A-Z of English Literature and The Romantics* in the 'Backgrounds to English Literature' series.

This article first appeared in *emagazine* 25 September 2004.

Print

### Romanticism and solitude

Daniel Stanley wrestles with the contradiction at the heart of much Romantic poetry: the gift of true community and human sympathy achieved through a retreat into Nature and solitude.

[Download the PDF of this article](#)

Article Written By: Daniel Stanley

This article was first published in *emagazine* 40, April 2009

Print

### Romanticism - an overview

Rob Worrall illuminates some of the shared concerns and approaches of the so-called Romantic writers, setting them in the context of a wider aesthetic shift during the 19th century.

#### Identifying, not defining

In 1923, an American Philosopher, Arthur O. Lovejoy, claimed that the term 'Romanticism':

... had ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign.

By this, he meant that the word had become such an umbrella term that clear definition had become impossible. This may be to overstate the case but it is certainly easier to identify the Romantic than to define it.

However, for those studying The Romantic Era at A2, all is not abstraction! If you have studied Jane Eyre or Byron at A1 you will already have located certain helpful signposts. The pictures of wildness and freedom conjured up in Jane's imagination, as she reads Bewick's *History Of British Birds*, sitting alone in the library of Gateshead House. Or the hysterical response to Brontë's novel by a contemporary reviewer ('Lady Eastlake') as she contemplated its socio-political radicalism, proclaiming that 'Every page burns with moral Jacobinism.' In Byron, you will have encountered the concept of the poet-hero as an activist willing to commit himself to the cause of Greek independence from imperial tyranny. Perhaps you may now be studying Blake, where you will encounter the intense contractions of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* or his visionary and prophetic voice in Jerusalem or Milton. Certainly, you should be aware of his view on Paradise Lost that Milton was '... of the Devil's party ...' even if he was not aware of it. It's a view echoed by Shelley and other Romantic commentators, championing those who dare to challenge authority. Hamlet may well be a further A2 text - one that was the subject of intense consideration by Hazlitt and Coleridge. Goethe and Carlyle - each a Romantic commentator on the troubled, constrained intellectual Prince, who finds himself at odds with the status quo.

Article Written By: Rob Worrall

This article first appeared in *emagazine* 36

Print



## The Poetry Foundation – An Introduction to British Romanticism

Looking for accessible and well-researched material online, I came across this brilliant piece (in the column to the right) from The Poetry Foundation, a wonderful US-based poetry website that includes articles and information about poets, as well as publishing a vast array of poetry from different periods (including lots of fantastic contemporary poetry). This introduction to Romanticism strikes me as a terrific, manageable and highly illuminating read. Try asking my questions (and ones of your own) as you read it. Then see if you can draw on the ideas it offers to deepen and enrich your interpretations of the poems you are reading.

## The British Library Learning

There are several good articles on the British Library website that, like *emagazine* articles, are written with students in mind.

If you read a variety of pieces that deal with similar or overlapping material, you will find that each time you encounter the ideas you will come at them with more knowledge and build up familiarity with the concepts. This familiarity breeds confidence and depth of understanding. So, reading a good few introductory pieces is much better than just one.

POETRY FOUNDATION  
POEMS & POETS HARRIET ARTICLES VIDEO PODCASTS LEARN EVENTS

### British Romanticism

An introduction to the poetic revolution that brought common people to literature's highest peaks.

BY THE EDITORS

'[I]f Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all,' proposed John Keats in an 1818 letter, at the age of 22. This could be called romantic in sentiment, lowercase r, meaning fanciful, impractical, unachievably ambitious. But Keats's axiom could also be taken as a one-sentence distillation of British Romanticism—with its all-or-nothing stance on the spontaneity of the highest art, its conviction of the sympathetic connections between nature's organic growth and human creativity, and its passion for individual imagination as an originating force. This period is generally mapped from the first political and poetic tremors of the 1780s to the 1832 Reform Act. No major period in English-language literary history is shorter than that half-century of the Romantic era, but few other eras have ever proved as consequential. Romanticism was nothing short of a revolution in how poets understood their art, its provenance, and its powers: ever since, English-language poets have furthered that revolution or formulated reactions against it.

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*six miles of fertile ground  
and Towers were comp*

### Romanticism

What inspired the iconic poetry of the Romantic period, and how did the Romantic poets portray landscape, class, radicalism and the sublime?

## Finally...

Finally, here is a brief example of how you might draw on the reading you've done to write in insightful ways about poems in the light of understanding about the context of romanticism. It isn't a 'model' for exam writing – in an exam you probably wouldn't have time for quite this kind of extended comment – and it shouldn't limit your thinking about how to draw on contextual material. However it might give you a sense of how contextual knowledge can be used fruitfully to think about the poetry, keeping the poems themselves at the very heart of your analysis. In this case the analysis uses ideas from The Poetry Foundation website and from Andrew Motion's article on Keats on the British Library Discovering Literature website.

*The Poetry Foundation introduction to Romanticism suggests that*

*Romantic poets looked curiously backward—to Greek mythology, friezes, and urns or to a distinctly British cultural past of medieval ruins and tales of knights and elves—to look speculatively forward.*

*This paradoxical idea of looking back in order to look forwards seems particularly important in relation to Keats, who drew on ancient mythology, for instance in 'Lamia', and went back to older forms like the ballad, in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' or medieval romance in 'St Agnes' Eve', yet despite that, broke with tradition in many significant ways. His vision was a radical one. The abandonment of the formal, stylised poetry of the eighteenth century, in favour of something more emotionally powerful and passionate is new and 'speculative' in relation to the conventions of his day, yet returns to a content of the past and what seems like a more honest and direct kind of poetry. The stories and aspects of style such as verse form echo earlier poets but with a new, radical slant. So, for instance, the seemingly old-fashioned tale of mystery and gothic suspense in 'St Agnes' Eve', reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, is married with a lush sensuality that pushes at the boundaries of acceptability in how it represents both female attractiveness to the male gaze and also female desire. The 'visions of delight' of 'young virgins' in the 'honey'd' middle of the night, and the descriptions of Madeline, as viewed by the lover Porphyro, are full of erotic power, especially as the moment of seeing her is held off, making the reader*

*wait and anticipate this moment. Madeline is presented as an active agent in a sexual encounter, offering up her body to a welcomed lover.*

*Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;  
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;  
Loosens her fragrant boddyce; by degrees  
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:*

*Likewise, in poems like 'Lamia', this is not just a rich telling of an already known story from past literature – there is a strong, new philosophical set of ideas that emerges through the storyline and the sensuality of the descriptions that puts into practice Keats' ideas about 'a life of sensation' being also 'a life of thoughts', with ideas being 'proved upon our pulses'.*

Barbara Bleiman is co-editor of *emagazine* and a consultant at the English and Media Centre.

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# The Angel in the House

## And the Mistress, Wife and Muse

Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* is a staple reference for A Level students working on the literature of the Victorian period. In this article Andrew Green explores this widely referred to, but probably hardly read, poem.

### Introduction

In almost any A Level essay on Victorian literature that deals with the representation of women, reference will be made somewhere to Coventry Patmore's most famous poem, *The Angel in the House*. Patmore, whose life spans almost the entire Victorian era (he lived from 1823–1896), was both a poet and a literary critic. *The Angel in the House* is a long narrative poem that was published in four sections over a period of eight years. The first two parts, 'The Betrothed' (1854) and 'The Espousals' (1856), are the subject of this article, and deal with the courtship and marriage of the poet and his first wife (fictionalised as Felix Vaughan and Honoria Churchill respectively). Two further volumes, *Faithful for Ever* (1860) and *The Victories of Love* (1862) are related to the first two poems, and deal with the life of Honoria's rejected suitor in the first two parts, Frederick Graham.

### Unity or Division?

The poem eulogises Emily Augusta Andrews, to whom Patmore was married from 1847 until her death in 1862. It explores the Victorian ideal of womanhood and marriage. To assume, however, that it is simply an idyllic portrayal of the relationship between the sexes, unquestioned and without complication, is to 'flatten' it and to miss the nuances of Patmore's vision. As our own era adopts a range of views of the sexes, so it is

unhelpful and inaccurate to assume that all Victorians would have concurred. As Carol Christ has observed, it is not only an ideal of womanhood the poem presents, but also

the male concerns that motivate fascination with that ideal.

In starting, therefore, it is interesting to note Patmore's use not only of Christian tradition, but also of classical mythology. From the outset this creates a sense of division and uncertainty in the narrative. Patmore invokes 'My homely Pegasus' and he refers to Honoria as

the very well-head ...

Whence gushes the Pierian spring

a water source sacred to the Greek Muses. These images from classical mythology are set alongside biblical figures such as Joshua, David and Michal, and the mythical figure of King Arthur. The accretion of such references establishes marriage as an elevated state. Interestingly, however, in 'Sarum Plain' Patmore also invokes pagan religion as he recalls a journey to Stonehenge and

the Druid rocks

That scowl'd their chill gloom from above,  
Like churls.

Together, this assortment of religious contexts creates a landscape of division and uncertainty that feels strangely distant from the certainties and securities we often unthinkingly attach to Victorian views.

### The Balance of Power

Where power resides within the relationship is an important and complex question. The Prologue to Book 1 shows how Frederick and Honoria's identities are bound up in each other:

How proud she always was

To feel how proud he was of her!

The poem undoubtedly seeks to present a good relationship. In 'The Impossibility', Patmore calls on 'Primal Love' to

Grant me the power of saying things

Too simple and too sweet for words!

This does not mean, however, that there are no difficulties. In 'The Poet's Confidence', for instance, Patmore's reference to 'love's abysmal ether rare' alerts us to hidden dangers, and he cryptically tells his readers they 'shall be sweetly help'd and warn'd'. The relationship between the sexes, this seems to imply, is sometimes a cause of hardship (see 'The Wife's Tragedy' and 'The Comparison'), but this is perhaps especially so for Honoria. In 'The Prototype' we see how the 'Co-equal Wisdom' of creation prioritises the male: 'Female and male God made the man; His image is the whole, not half', and 'The Epitaph' makes clear that Honoria has to accept Frederick as 'unconditionally Lord /Of her'. The relationship between the sexes works particularly to the advantage of the male:



Mother and Daughters Circa 1850  
Contributor: Amoret Tanner / Alamy Stock Photo

Her graces make him rich, and ask  
No guerdon

and Honoria's situation is vulnerable.

In 'The Changed Allegiance',  
Honorio recognises

His power to do or guard from harm.

Hers is a circumscribed world where her  
access to life and knowledge is always  
through the 'gatekeeper' male: and where

Her will's indomitably bent

On mere submissiveness to him.

'The Chace' also illustrates Honorio's  
difficult situation, imagining her afloat  
'Within a lonely castle-moat'; a place of  
isolation and vulnerability, outside the  
protection of the castle itself. She is left in  
confusion at the approach of suitors:

But who now meets her on the way?

Comes he as enemy or friend,  
Or both?

The male, meanwhile, is anthropomorphised  
as a serpent gliding through the grass who

fascinates her fluttering will,

Then terrifies with dreadful strides.

The poem's conclusion captures Honorio's  
stark reality:

Should she be won,

It must not be believed or thought

She yields; she's chased to death, undone,  
Surprised, and violently caught.

Honorio, however, is in certain ways able  
to use her position to assert herself. Her  
elevation to the status of 'angel' places  
Frederick in a nominally subservient  
role; he is

Liege ever to the noble pride

Of her unconquer'd majesty

'Accepted'

and Honorio can (and does) command  
certain forms of respect. Poems such as  
'The Paragon' idealise and objectify the  
woman in terms of heavenly perfection:

She seem'd expressly sent below

To teach our erring minds to see

The rhythmic changes of time's swift flow

As part of all eternity.

And Patmore explicitly states that he is  
looking to write:

A worthy hymn in woman's praise,

A hymn bright-noted like a bird's,

Arousing these song-sleepy times

With rhapsodies of perfect words

Indeed, Honorio is raised even beyond the  
status of an angel to become an object  
of worship:

that churl shall nowhere be

Who bends not, awed, before the throne

Of her affecting majesty.

Such idolisation of women goes so far that  
it sometimes seems Patmore is even gently  
mocking it. Frederick's friend Frank in 'The  
Friends', for example, loses himself in clichés  
and in rhetoric that Patmore's verse seems  
to satirise:

She is so lovely, true, and pure,

Her virtue virtue so endears,

That often, when I think of her,

Life's meanness fills my eyes with tears –

## The Angel, The Mistress and the Muse

'Angel', however, is not Honorio's only role.  
The Prologue explicitly states that she is  
to be 'Mistress, Wife, and Muse', a triptych  
of potentially conflicting roles. How, for  
instance, does the poem deal with physical  
attraction and desire? To Frederick, Honorio is

In shape no slender Grace,

But Venus

and he praises

Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love.

Indeed, he is left wondering

where those daisy eyes

Had found their touching curve and droop

and it seems that this particular angel in  
the house is quite aware of the power of  
desire she exercises over him. Nor are  
physical attraction and desire solely a male  
preserve, as we see

the woman's eagerness

For amity full-sign'd and seal'd'

an eagerness fulfilled when she goes on to

[offer] up for sacrifice

Her heart's reserve.

Desire is an ambiguous force, however, as  
we see at the end of the 'The Tribute', where  
the rich outpouring of nature's gifts ends  
with a sting as the woman is thereby framed  
as a temptress; the things of nature

proclaim

Her beauty's clear prerogative

To profit so by Eden's blame.

Probably the most overt representation  
of physical desire comes in 'The Dance',  
where Frederick admits:

I wish'd the world might run to wreck,

So I but once might fling myself

Obliviously about her neck.

It is left to Honorio to apply restraint,  
symbolised by the 'the rays/Withdrawn'  
from her smiling eyes, obliging Frederick  
to regain control of himself. This captures  
the cloying difficulties of Victorian romance  
and the expression of love and desire. The  
challenges women faced in managing  
these tensions are perhaps best captured in  
'The Tribute' where Frederick observes that

she who in her dress reveals

A fine and modest taste, displays

More loveliness than she conceals.

The awkward compromise that's reached  
between Honorio's physical desirability and  
her 'angelic' untouchability is also seen in  
'The Dance':

And though her charms are a strong law

Compelling all men to admire,

They go so clad with lovely awe

None but the noble dares desire.

This implies a further important dimension  
of the relationship between the sexes,  
as Honorio's 'perfection' makes a return  
demand upon Frederick. So, in 'Honorio',  
she is imagined telling him: 'He that's for  
heaven itself unfit./Let him not hope to  
merit me', Frederick is repeatedly required  
to live up to the standards set by Honorio  
(though these are, ironically, the standards  
set for her by men). This creates an awkward  
interdependence whereby neither Honorio  
nor Frederick can be truly themselves, but  
have to sustain a mutual construct based  
on unattainable ideals. 'The Comparison'  
takes this further, clearly and painfully  
outlining the differences between the  
'perfect' woman and the 'failing' man. It is  
only in the 'angelic' sacrifice of the woman's  
will that the two can be reconciled. This  
reconciliation is conveniently figured in  
'The Wife's Tragedy' as something that  
women 'naturally' want to effect:

Man must be pleased; but him to please

Is woman's pleasure

The same dynamic does not work in  
reverse, however, as we see in 'The  
Daughter of Eve' when

The woman's gentle mood o'erstept

Withers my love'



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These and a wealth of other tensions are summed up in 'The Queen's Room', where Patmore sublimates the contradictory forces at work in the relationship between the sexes into an image from weaving:

Attraction warp and reverence woof.

## Conclusions

*The Angel in the House* is built upon the idea of interdependency between men and women in the Victorian era. Behind apparent mutuality and the idolisation of women, however, lies a world of troubled uncertainty, exacerbated by sexual stereotypes, even misogyny, as expressed in 'In Love':

To the sweet folly of the dove,  
She joins the cunning of the snake.

And Patmore continues:

Her mode of candour is deceit;  
And what she thinks from what she'll say  
(Although I'll never call her cheat)  
Lies far as Scotland from Cathay.

While his tone is offensive, we can see that Frederick struggles with the awareness that Honoria, his 'angel', is not always angelic. Likewise, Honoria has to face the reality that Frederick is himself a man who fails and lets her down. Beneath the idealised surface of

the perfect Victorian relationship bubble forces with which neither party is well equipped to deal. There is therefore, in spite of what we might deem an undue focus on himself, something profoundly humane and even touching in the final assessment Frederick offers in 'The Koh-i-Noor':

But what at all times I admire  
Is, not that she is wise or good,  
But just the thing which I desire.

Patmore's presentation of marriage is far from the purely idyllic vision of domestic bliss that might be expected. His vision of relationships is much more nuanced and aware than passing references to the poem in A Level essays often assume. He charts for his readers a troubled, confusing and often refreshingly honest journey, captured in all its confusing reality in 'The Foreign Land':

A woman is a foreign land,  
Of which, though there he settle young,  
A man will ne'er quite understand  
The customs, politics, and tongue.

A view, we can be certain, that Honoria would echo in relation to Frederick.

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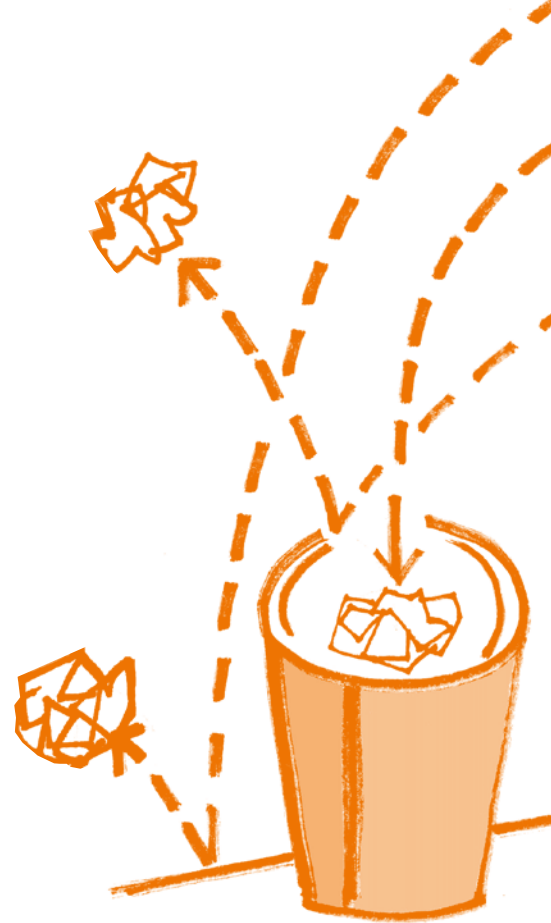
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# Metaphors of the Digital Age

## Pioneering or Imprisoning?

The metaphors we use tell us a lot about how we relate to the world, not least of all those that have developed to explain new technological developments in computers and social media. Caroline Godfrey analyses some key aspects.



Far from being decorative objects used only by poets and authors to spice up literary texts, metaphors are a fundamental feature of language that can help us appreciate how we, as a human race, engage with our world and how this engagement might evolve over time.

### Files and Folders

The fact that metaphors can tell us so much about how we relate to the world means that the language that has been developed to talk about and represent new areas of human experience, such as technology, is an endlessly fascinating area of study. As I sit at my desktop computer, typing in a file that I will save to one of my many folders, it is clear that much of the language that we use to discuss modern computer technology is highly metaphorical in a way that has enabled users to envisage new tools as more high-tech versions of our old, familiar ones. This **skeuomorphism** – designing elements of computer technology to mimic their real-world counterparts – is thought to be reassuring for new users, neutralising the threat of state-of-the-art products by drawing on familiar elements of their current lifestyle. In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), N. Katherine Hayles refers to skeuomorphs as

threshold devices, smoothing the transition between one conceptual constellation and another.

### Advice from Apple

This explains why in their design guidelines, Apple actually advise new app developers to draw on visual metaphors:

when virtual objects and actions in an app are metaphors for familiar experiences ... users quickly grasp how to use the app.

Such guidance helps spell out for us why the Instagram app icon used to look like a retro camera, the Dropbox app icon features a cardboard box to be used for 'safe keeping' and the Google Tasks app showcases a box checked with a tick. The design concept behind these apps, and others like them, has prompted commentators, such as DeGusta in his article in the *Technology Review* (May 9, 2012), to claim that the skeuomorphic user interface of the smartphone aided designers in creating the most rapidly adopted computer platform ever.

### Social Media as Beauty Pageant

So, metaphors, both verbal and visual, can make the general public feel more comfortable with rapidly changing technology, but they can also help us to understand and reflect on the impact that this new technology is having on our lives. For many of us, the use of social media has become so routine, so ingrained in our

day-to-day lives, that we completely fail to appreciate how it is shaping our lives and our culture. Some researchers, such as le Roux and Parry<sup>1</sup> believe that metaphor provides the perfect antidote to this blindsiding effect and can facilitate a critical reflection on the impact that social media is having on society. One of the metaphors that le Roux and Parry have developed for the purpose of this evaluation is 'social media as beauty pageant', which highlights the way that users routinely make use of available tools to optimise their self-presentation online, while the recipients of these posts function as the pageant audience, 'judging' what they see (and hear) through mechanisms such as liking, retweeting and commenting. Le Roux and Parry believe that such metaphors are particularly helpful in enabling 'digital natives', such as the readers of this very magazine, to consider the agency of social media in shaping their social behaviour and relationships.

### Gorging on Validation

In a collection of striking image metaphors, designer Ben Fearnley<sup>2</sup> has also attempted to encapsulate how people interact with different social media platforms. His project is well worth taking a look at in full, but as an example, Fearnley depicts Instagram as a plate piled high with delicacies that



all resemble the Instagram app icon. Next to the plate, knife and fork, held up by a decorative dinner sign is the caption:

Insta-feed your ego.

Fearnley's implication seems clear: using Instagram is a self-indulgent habit. We gorge on the validation provided by other users liking our pictures and posts, just like we might stuff ourselves full of sweets and chocolate, knowing all the while that this is both unhealthy and ill-advised.

## Metaphors That Deceive and Constrain

So far, this is all sounding very positive. Is it possible then to say that metaphors are simply one of the human race's greatest survival tools, enabling us to both cope with radical change, and providing us with enough critical distance to evaluate these changes? Of course, like most things in life, it really isn't that simple. Perhaps we could argue that metaphors are just that little bit too reassuring. In a world in which concepts of authorship have changed and creativity is often more about selection and curation than building something from scratch, many of the skeuomorphic metaphors that are built into contemporary software are at pains to keep reassuring us of our agency. The metaphoric terms 'cut' and 'paste', suggestive of the physical activity of crafting, seek to convince us of our creativity. You are in the driver's seat, they seem to say, as we perform the banal task of clicking, and then clicking again to 'cut' an object from one virtual location and 'paste' it in another.

Some commentators would go as far as to say that the metaphors that underpin skeuomorphic tools and devices, as in the example above, are actually crippling the design industry by chaining designers to the past. You could say, like Viticci in his post on MacStories (Jan 27, 2012), that the iPhone homescreen is conceptually flawed by being tied to the fact that it is supposed to represent a physical surface, the apps originally intended to look like objects resting on this surface. However, the HOMESCREEN IS A SURFACE metaphor is crucially undermined by the fact that it also intended to provide a gateway to an immaterial, digital world. Freeing up designers from clunky representations such as this one would give them licence to reimagine how technological products might best work for us in the twenty-first century.



## Leakage from Social Media to Everyday Life

While metaphors in the technological world leave designers hamstrung, they can also have an even more damaging effect on social behaviour due to a process that has been referred to by Forceville (2000), in his article 'Compasses, beauty queens and other PCs: pictorial metaphors in computer advertisements', as metaphorical 'backlash'. If, Forceville questions, metaphors work by mapping features from a source domain onto a target, in order to make this target more tangible and therefore easier to explain, surely this process could also work the other way. It is easy to see the benefits of discussing social media platforms (the target) as if they were an established practice from everyday life such as beauty pageants (the source), but what happens when this is reversed, and features of the target are mapped onto the source, when we are no longer viewing social media platforms as if they were our everyday lives, but viewing our everyday lives as if they were social media platforms? It is perhaps this 'backlash' that is at the root of the twenty-first century phenomenon of 'cancel culture'. The apparent ease with which people can now be written out of social and cultural life smacks of social media conventions, whereby one can block or silence anyone one chooses, simply at the click of a button. The rights and wrongs of contemporary 'cancel culture' are debatable, but what seems certain is that the practice represents a leakage from

the sphere of social media, the digital logic of 'blocking' mapped onto the real world.

## A Metaphorical Backlash?

What should give us pause for thought is not the 'cancelling' phenomenon per se, but the very fact that metaphorical backlash can occur right under our noses, without us really being aware it's happening. Perhaps the metaphors that we live by in the digital age are not, after all, liberating, but constraining. Maybe in so blithely imbuing the world of social media with a logic imported from everyday reality, we have been blinded as to the effect of its attendant backlash – our social lives straitjacketed by sociodigital metaphors of our own creation.

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# 'It is a sin to write this'

## The Prohibition of Language in Dystopia

Jessica Norledge has been writing about the language of dystopia for over ten years, working to unpick the style of dystopian literature and the experience of reading dystopian narratives. In this article, she examines the restriction of language use in dystopian worlds, paying particular attention to metaphors of reading, writing, and communication.

## Language in Dystopia

As a stylistician – someone who is interested in the style of language – I spend the majority of my time analysing the linguistic intricacies of literary texts. Specifically, of dystopian texts. The preposition, 'of', in that last sentence is extremely important to my research, which centres on the language of dystopia. Drawing upon a range of methods and tools from the discipline of cognitive stylistics, my work seeks to identify those key characteristics and features which help categorise and define dystopia as a genre. In analysing such patterns it is impossible, however, not to also consider the role of language *in* dystopia, of language as a concept, and as an element of dystopian world-building. After all, language often lies at the heart of dystopia, being realised as the dystopian **novum**, the new object or concept foregrounded in a particular fiction that prompts defamiliarisation and estrangement.

It is the readerly identification of the novum which enables cross-world mappings, inviting the reader to recognise a dystopian world as different from, yet connected to,



Big Brother is Watching poster, 1984, 1956  
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their own. Thinking about language as the novum, we might, for instance, encounter a dystopian future in which the characters speak a unique dialect or fictional language, as in *A Clockwork Orange* or *Ridley Walker*. We might experience dystopian worlds in which spoken language is in some way restricted or monitored as in *Vox* and *The Giver*. Writing – particularly in private – may prove to be a dangerous practice, as it is for Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and reading may be forbidden or criminalised as in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Fahrenheit 451*.

In the majority of these texts, communication plays a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of a dystopian hierarchy and the subjugation of particular individuals. Accordingly, language is also the tool of the dystopian maverick, being key to rebellion and revolution. In reclaiming language, characters metaphorically (and sometimes literally) regain their voices, challenging the rules and expectations of a characteristically oppressive world. The moments in which language is lost, concealed, or recovered are consequently highly emotive, as evidenced by the poignant metaphors used to describe

language practice in its variant forms. In what remains of this article, I'd like to pull apart some of these metaphors, as drawn from a small selection of dystopian novels and understood in terms of **Conceptual Metaphor Theory**.

### A Cognitive-Stylistic Approach to Metaphor

Conceptual Metaphor Theory was developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in the 1980s as a way of accounting for the metaphors that surround us, that underpin and shape everyday experience. There are metaphors everywhere! In their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson proposed that metaphors could be realised as **conceptual mappings**, as the plotting of particular characteristics between two distinct domains. The first, the **target domain**, identifies the element or concept that we're looking to describe. The second, the **source domain**, details the element or concept through which we can better understand or conceptualise the target. For example, consider the sentence,

*It would cost me sixteen words.*



Here we have the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS MONEY (the use of small caps is standard for expressing conceptual metaphors). The verb 'cost' is one which we use in English to signal 'price' and is typically applied to something which can be spent, most commonly money. Money is therefore the source domain for this particular conceptual mapping. The target is language, here represented metonymically through the noun 'words'. The words are what is being spent.

If we consider the qualities or attributes we associate with money, we can imagine the words presented in the above example as something which have quantifiable worth, and as something that may be limited in supply. The value of money, as projected by the source, effectively signals the value of words, the target. You are likely to be familiar with the idea of words having value as there are lots of phrases in English which rely on the conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS MONEY: e.g. 'I value what you're saying', 'that's just my two pennies worth'. However, when placed back in its original dystopian context, the metaphor and the sentence carry an unexpected and much darker meaning.

Taken from Christina Dalcher's feminist dystopian novel *Vox* the above example reflects the evaluations of the narrator who, being a woman, is legally bound to utter no more than one hundred words a day. Such restrictions are placed on all female American citizens, who are required by the US government to wear a word-counter (in my mind this looks like a Fitbit), which issues an electric shock for every ten words they use above their daily quota. The 'cost' of individual words is therefore pricey, with 'overspending' having dangerous consequences. The presentation of words as a commodity is neatly tied to the risk of verbosity, as evidenced further by the conceptual metaphor WORDS ARE VALUABLE RESOURCES (e.g. 'they've seen what happens when we overuse words', 'she never wastes words') and the somewhat literalised conceptual metaphor WORDS ARE SHARP INSTRUMENTS, for example:

the words continue pouring out, flying through the hall towards me like poisoned darts

each [word] stings

each [word] pierces my once-tough skin with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.

## This Illicit Reading of Mine

Reading and writing are also prohibited in *Vox*, with books and stationary being locked away beyond the reach of the narrator and her daughter. It is interesting how often we see reading and writing criminalised in dystopia. As sources of knowledge and symbols of free will and free thought, books are often seized or destroyed by dystopian political systems. In *Fahrenheit 451*, for instance, a narrative in which firefighters are tasked with burning books, the threat of reading is presented through the conceptual metaphor BOOKS ARE WEAPONS:

a book is a loaded gun in the house next door [...] who knows who might be the target of the well-read man.

Here we have the direct mapping A BOOK IS A GUN, extended through the use of 'target' and the substitution of 'well-armed' with 'well-read'. The implication of the metaphor is that reading is a dangerous practice, one which can make humans unpredictable and it is life-threatening.

To moderate such a threat, reading and writing are often presented as crimes or even sin, as in Rand's *Anthem* (e.g. 'It is a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see') and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which Offred frequently reflects on 'the sin of reading'. In fact, when Offred is once again allowed to read – illicitly, in the company of the Commander – she describes the experience in terms of sin:

On these occasions I read quickly, voraciously, almost skimming, trying to get as much into my head as possible before the next long starvation. If it were eating it would be the gluttony of the famished, if it were sex it would be a swift furtive stand-up in an alley somewhere.

Applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory we can see two conceptual mappings at work here. The first, **READING IS EATING**, presents books as food. Offred reads 'voraciously', a term which not only refers to an enthusiastic or eager action process but is also specific to the devouring of food (i.e. 'a voracious appetite'). The word 'mouth' is substituted with 'head' in the phrase 'trying to get as much into my head', and we have the following use of 'starvation' which extends the metaphor to signal a type of mental hunger. The conceptual metaphor is then explicitly realised through the conditional 'If [reading] were eating it would be the gluttony of the famished', in which the act of eating is intensified, where 'gluttony' – one of the seven deadly sins – connotes over-indulgence. When paired with the prepositional phrase 'of the famished', such hunger is linked back to starvation; however, signalling intense need rather than excess.

Lust, as another deadly sin, is also used in this particular example to illustrate Offred's desire to read, exemplified through the conceptual metaphor **READING IS SEX**:

*if it were sex it would be a swift furtive stand-up in an alley somewhere*

in which the use of 'swift' and 'furtive' imply the need to avoid notice, to not be caught, and the potential guilt that comes with reading as a forbidden pleasure. Such mappings are further evidenced in Offred's descriptions of the Commander as he watches her read. She notes:

*This watching is a curiously sexual act, and I feel undressed while he does it.*

She likens her reading to a 'kind of performance' (**READING IS PERFORMANCE**), one which though craved is made uncomfortable by the Commander's silent and unwavering gaze.

The above example presents only two of many metaphors of reading, both within *The Handmaid's Tale* and the dystopian genre more broadly, and there's plenty more



Faye Dunaway and Natasha Richardson in *The Handmaid's Tale*, d. Volker Schlöndorff, 1989. Contributor: United Archives GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo

to say about the prohibition of language in all forms within the dystopian sphere. That being said, I hope this brief analysis has given you a taste for stylistics and demonstrated how stylistic frameworks, such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory, can enrich and enliven a literary analysis.

## Further Reading

If you're interested in looking further at conceptual metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By* is an accessible and enjoyable read. You can also find a concise explanatory account and accompanying stylistic application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in Peter Stockwell's (2020) *Cognitive Poetics. An Introduction*. For more on the stylistics of dystopia, check out my recent book *The Language of Dystopia*, which includes further analysis on each of the texts touched on in this article.

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# SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

## Dramatis Personae and Character Criticism

Character criticism is something that A Level students may do quite a lot of, looking for plausible motivations and psychological truth. But Professor Emma Smith argues that there other, equally or even more interesting and important, ways of exploring the figures who people Shakespeare's plays.

Open your Shakespeare edition – Arden, Penguin, random old library book – and turn to the beginning of the play. The preceding or facing page, no matter what edition, will probably contain a list of characters. Sometimes this will have the Latin heading 'Dramatis Personae', and its function is to outline the participants of the drama to

come. Take the Arden edition of *Othello*, for instance. It has a 'List of Roles' beginning with Othello at the top, and ending with the bit parts of 'Messenger, Herald, Attendants' at the bottom. In passing we might notice that the women are listed beneath the men, and that their descriptions peg them to their male relatives, so that Desdemona is 'wife to Othello and Brabantio's daughter'. These lists of characters give us a kind of anticipatory map of their play. When we see Sebastian, Viola's twin, included in a prefatory list for *Twelfth Night* we know that he is not in fact drowned as his sister initially fears; the list gives us notice that the lost princes in *Cymbeline* are just waiting to emerge.

### Coming into Being Through Speech

So far, so obvious. It is now such a standard part of plays in print to include a list of characters at the start that it is strange to be reminded that Shakespeare's plays did not carry this information when they were first published. If you opened the edition of *Othello* published in 1622, for instance, you would have simply found the stage

direction 'Enter Iago and Roderigo' (the list of characters in the Folio text of 1623 comes after, not before, the play text). There was no indication of who they are, or who else we might expect to meet during the unfolding drama. Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass amplify the significance of this historical distinction in a brilliant article published in 1993. For them the list of dramatis personae implies that 'characters pre-exist their speeches' whereas the form of Shakespeare's early plays, without such lists, means that characters are the product of the language they are given to speak.<sup>1</sup> That's to say we begin to understand who Iago and Roderigo are only as a result of what they say in the first scene of *Othello*. They come into being through speech.

The methodological approach known as **character criticism** has a long history and is still a standard part of study of the plays in school. Its central premiss is the plausibility – the lifelikeness – of the protagonists of Shakespearean drama. We can analyse their motives and their unspoken thoughts and question them as if they were real people. Did Gertrude know about the murder of her first husband? Why does Iago behave as







he does? Is Mercutio in love with Romeo? Arguing about the personalities and intentions of Shakespearean characters is part of the powerful (and enjoyable) illusion that we are getting to know them.

There are, however, other, more theatrical and practical ways to think about how Shakespeare, as playwright and theatre-maker, uses his characters in non-realist ways to tell his stories.

### Writing Character

After Romeo's conversation with Juliet at her window and his emerging sense of the difficulties posed by their relationship, he vows to go to the Friar to get his help. In the early version of *Romeo and Juliet* in print there is a kind of glitch in the text. The last lines of 2.2, spoken by Romeo, and the first lines of 2.3, spoken by the Friar, offer an almost identical description of the dawn sky, each beginning with 'The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night'. Most editors have recognised that this is unintentional, and have deleted one of the occurrences (usually judging it more appropriate to the ruminating Friar than the loved-up swain). But the probable cause of the duplication is relevant to thinking about Shakespeare's characterisation. It seems that he wrote the lines of poetry first, and only second, thought about who best should speak them, placing the lines with Romeo and then with the Friar, to see where they fitted best. De Grazia and Stallybrass suggested that character was a product of speech.

Here we can see the speech being tried out on different characters before our eyes.

Sometimes Shakespearean characters are described as roles rather than individuals. Edmund in *King Lear* is called 'Bastard' in the stage directions and speech prefixes; at a point in his trial in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock becomes, horrifyingly, named simply 'Jew'. These are figures who behave as they do because of their deterministic social or dramatic role, not because of their hidden individual motivations. For Shakespeare, characters can be seen as a requirement of plot, rather than the other way around. The idea that a character might be a plot device is usually expressed now as a criticism, a failure of verisimilitude, but perhaps this priority of character is anachronistic. Once the Duke has set in motion the plot of *Measure for Measure*, its fraught psycho-sexual triangle can only be resolved by introducing an additional female character.

**Have you not heard speak of Mariana, the sister of Frederick, the great soldier who miscarried at sea?**

the Duke declares excitedly, almost half-way through the plot (3.1.232-3), with the air of a playwright triumphantly producing the answer to a narrative problem, and, indeed, it is Mariana who brings about the play's uneasily comic conclusion. Other characters – Fortinbras or Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Emilia or perhaps Iago in *Othello* – might also be understood as plot devices. It is less interesting to ask about

their motivations than about the narrative consequences of their actions: they are present for what they do, rather than who they are.

### Performing Character

Just as a remnant of authorial drafting in the text of *Romeo and Juliet* gave an insight into Shakespeare's composition of character, another textual hiccup helps us see something about their original performance. Some of the lines for Dogberry, the bumbling constable of *Much Ado About Nothing*, are attributed not to the character's name, but that of the actor, the famous comedian Will Kemp. It's a moment that reveals Dogberry as a vehicle for Kemp's famous comic schtick: getting words mixed up, an element of slapstick, a sense of unplanned but irrepressible anarchy. Shakespeare wrote other roles too for particular actors, drawing on their skills and physicality in his conception of the character. Richard Burbage, the talented tragedian of the Chamberlain's, later King's Men, was the first Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth. Just as Dogberry showcased Kemp's skillset, so Hamlet, for instance, was a star vehicle for Burbage. Bart van Es has written about how Shakespeare's plays are shaped by the actors in his company, and of Burbage he writes that

**the actor's pre-eminence rested in the 'true' depiction of grief.**

If we think of some of Hamlet's soliloquies less as the outpouring of Hamlet the



disconsolate prince, and more as turns by Burbage the star tragedian, perhaps we can see the play's depiction of character differently.<sup>2</sup>

## The Practice of Doubling

One final aspect of performance that disrupts our standard understanding of realistic character is the practice of doubling. Shakespeare's plays typically include twenty or more named parts, to be performed by a company of twelve to fifteen actors. Some actors played more than one role. Sometimes this practice of doubling was not simply a logistical necessity, but a thematic strand in the play. That Athens should be ruled by Theseus and Hippolyta, and the fairy kingdom of the woods by the same actors playing Oberon and Titania, connects the waking and dream worlds of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Cordelia and the Fool in *King Lear* seem to alternate, and, played by the same actor, serve as linked loyal truth-tellers.

Any character who appears only in a limited part of the play was probably doubled. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is an interesting example: doubling his role with the Grave-digger, or with Fortinbras, or with Claudius, makes different forms of connection across the play world. Productions of *Macbeth* have deployed the witches in other, sometimes unspoken roles in the play, emphasising their omnipresence beyond their active scenes. History plays often suggest that their histories are cyclical rather than linear,

by recasting actors whose characters have been killed in new roles. By suggesting that characters are not single or self-contained, but performances sharing a body with other characters at different times, doubling unsettles any assumption that they can be recognised as real human individuals.

## The Questions We Ask

Both Shakespeare's writing practices and the theatre for which he wrote thus operate in ways that disturb some of the traditional realist assumptions of character criticism. One suggestion for moving our critical conversation on is to change the questions we ask of Shakespearean characters. Rather than asking why a character behaves in a certain way, we might wonder why the play needs this behaviour at this point, or how it would look were this character not part of the story. Locating motivation in the play and its storytelling, rather than in the mindset of the individuals who operate it, can give us a new understanding. This post-psychological Shakespearean world could be more than simply an echo-chamber for our own egotistic sense the supremacy of character.

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# The God of Small Things



## The River as a Site of Resistance

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Hannah Morris explores the symbolism of the river in Arundhati Roy's novel, revealing the role it plays in the plot but also as a liminal realm, in which damaging ideologies can be questioned.

In her political essays, Arundhati Roy recognises how overcoming the inequalities that arise from race, caste, gender, environmental degradation, and historical context within society demands a fresh means of viewing the world. In her fiction, Roy's experiments with physical spaces allow her to create protected spaces where ingrained ideology can be erased, and society rebuilt in terms of social justice and democracy for all. Such spaces I define as liminal realms, where the rigid laws of caste, gender and tradition can be temporarily forgotten, providing the central characters escape from the straightjackets that society imposes through their fixed worlds and narrow identify definitions.

*The God of Small Things* (1997) is set in the verdant environment of Ayemenem, Kerala. The narrative is predominantly filtered through the eyes of the fraternal twins, Estha and Rahel, and oscillates between 1969, when the twins are seven, and 1993, when they are reunited. The amalgamation of ancient Hindu traditions, fourth century Syrian Christian culture, colonial history, and communist ideology

produces a fraught atmosphere, which is exacerbated by the dictatorial Love Laws, the devastating effects of which are explicit in Velutha and Ammu's inter-caste affair as well as the twins' sexual intercourse. The first step in overcoming such oppressive narratives is creating room for manoeuvre through a renegotiation of space, so that individuals can escape strict labels and re-define themselves. Those with a hybrid identity, such as Ammu, with 'no position anywhere at all' and her twins,

*Half-Hindu Hybrids, whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry*

are already excluded from society and, hence, their only option is to defy social laws. Such defiance is facilitated at the Meenachal River which serves as a liminal site for Ammu that enables her to momentarily forget the Love Laws, liberating her to pursue her hidden passion for Velutha. Meanwhile, the river provides Ammu's twins with brief respite from the burden of their complex identity, posing as a surrogate mother who allows them to assume any identity they please.

### The River as a Site of Resistance

Initially, the struggles of Ammu and her family, excluded from society and subject to the oppression of outside forces, are embodied by the river. The novel's non-sequential narrative illuminates how both the characters and the river are burdened by the toxicity of colonialism and neo-colonialism, establishing an affinity between them. The river

*smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils.*

Roy's ecocritical approach is evident as she elucidates how, before, the river

*had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flower.*

The river's congealed waters and stagnant flow, humanised,



with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed,

parallels the ghosts of the History House, which overlooks the river and represents the amputation of India's past:

map-breath'd ancestors with tough toenails whispered to the lizards on the wall.

The oppressive use of cartography during colonialism is evoked as U. Kalpagam (1995) outlines how British mapwork

involved very complex processes of retrieving knowledges, reconstructing histories

where space was controlled to gain authority:

cartography rendered it possible to define and fix boundaries, demarcate territories and locate persons and objects in fixed spaces.

The characters are similarly caused to stagnate by the oppression of colonial history: Ammu

refuse[s] to acknowledge the passage of time

while her twins are rendered into 'frozen two-egg fossils'.

However, Roy recognises nature's resilience and the river's seditious potential becomes apparent:

The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild

creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded road.

At the History House, history is compressed into a singular space and isolated, yet the river's continued flow allows it to move beyond and overcome the ways in which colonialism controlled the independent development of India and caused it to stagnate. Consequently, the characters are briefly liberated from their trapped states and the colonial past is reclaimed when the river dismantles the infrastructure of modernity and salvages the site. This subversive potential renders the Meenachal a liminal space, an in-between site outside of the laws of society, where its constant flow allows the characters to shed their restrictive, fixed, preordained definitions and claim a new identity.

### **Ammu Transported by the River**

Ammu is additionally burdened by strict patriarchal laws and caste oppression. However, this liminal space, a protected bubble of calm, allows her to momentarily forget her oppression, letting her mind enter whichever new realm she pleases. Her previous endeavours to escape Ayemmenem's strict rules see her married to an abusive alcoholic. Home is an unforgiving place, where her mother perceives her as a burden and her divorce just retribution for marrying outside the family. However, when music spreads like 'a liquid ache' through 'her skin' Ammu is transported

out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place

a new universe at the waterside. Ammu is united with the natural environment with 'flowers in her hair', while her shift

from a safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk

encapsulates the river's unpredictable current. She sheds restrictive definitions,

temporarily set[ting] aside the morality of motherhood and divorcehood.

She is imbued with subversive potential – on days like this, everybody 'just Let Her Be' – and, when Roy locates the political yet deeply intimate, interpersonal violence of bioterrorism in the mother figure, we understand the extent to which she will go to overcome societal oppression, while prefiguring the drastic consequences of her transgression:

It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber.

### **Ammu Embodying the River**

The peak of Ammu's liberation, during her forbidden affair, is encapsulated in her embodiment of the river:

she was as wide and deep as a river in spate. He sailed on her waters.

Through kineticism, the river's subversive flow could be linked with the fluidity of female genitalia during orgasm and menstruation, encapsulated in Ammu's gushing bodily fluids and reproductive potential. Her twins are 'little fish who met (swimming) through their lovely mother's cunt'. Froula (2009) summarises how

Ammu's body renders the social fabric that prevents the cultural contamination of castes mixing porous and subject to infiltration. Her sexual encounter with Velutha at the river, then, threatens to marginalise the mainstream

Figuratively, Ammu's gushing bodily fluids push the conventional aside since intercourse with Velutha physically breaches caste boundaries:

an untouchable tongue touched the innermost part of her.

In Debjani Ganguly's words (2005),

Roy captures beautifully the moment when the untouchable, away from the contempt



Public domain

and condescension of upper-caste society, really lives.

The epigraph continues:

Velutha looked up and saw things that he hadn't seen before. Things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers.

For a fleeting moment, this liminal space at the riverbank allows caste to be forgotten and Velutha, too, can escape the oppression of the past.

## The River as Surrogate Mother

Not only does the river directly emancipate Ammu, but it further supports her by shouldering the roles in which she has failed, posing as a surrogate mother to her twins. Estha 'longs for' the calm of the river after he is sexually assaulted, which later educates the twins in 'silence (like the children of the Fisher People)' and 'the bright language of dragonflies'. The river's ability to carve its path around every obstacle encountered teaches the children to adapt to their trauma. Estha learns 'to think thoughts and not voice them' and is posited as a fish, the river's ward, who remains inactive to survive extreme conditions. His silence

wasn't an accusing, protesting silence as much as a sort of estivation, a dormancy, the psychological equivalent of what lungfish do to get themselves through the dry season.

Hence, not only does the river serve as a space of calm where they can forget traumatic events, it additionally teaches them to navigate their complex identity and exclusion from society. Of course, we

cannot overlook that Sophie Mol dies in the river. However, perhaps this violent act against a white child epitomises the agony endured under colonial oppression and the destructive extent to which the river will go to fight back.

## Liminal Spaces – Literary and Real

The river is just one example of the liminal spaces that Roy creates in her literature. Not only does the creation of such spaces liberate her characters, but their significance extends beyond the text. When Roy establishes such realms, she advocates for their re-creation in the real world, encouraging her readers to recognise and celebrate difference, to travel fluidly through life, like the river, and shed, as well as accept others' shedding of, restrictive categories. Paralleling Estha and Rahel, Roy wants us to become the river's students, carrying what we learn from her literature into the world at large. For Roy, fiction itself is her liminal realm, where everything and nothing can exist at once – an imaginary world to provide an alternative means of existence. *God of Small Things* poses the question:

'If you eat fish in a dream, does it count? Does it mean you've eaten fish?'

before answering,

'Yes, if in a dream you've eaten fish, it means you've eaten fish'.

Roy utilises the novels' complex relationships with language, society, and characterisation, to advocate for a new civilisation, free from injustice. Her form encourages a surrendering of self which

renders us open to alternative worldviews. We succumb to seeing through a new lens before we acknowledge the political arguments woven into the plot.

## An Accessible Liminal Realm

Ultimately, it is insignificant whether Roy's liminal realms or the afterlife are physically real, what matters is the place they hold in one's imagination. As opposed to a fixed location, liminal spaces are about a mental re-organisation which exposes space as a malleable societal construct, a putty which must be remoulded to accommodate for everyone. However, Roy's realist descriptions of the river render it one of her most accessible liminal realms, causing it to be the starting point of my analysis. This clearly evoked literal place transports us into the text before its symbolic purpose is revealed. Now, the more emancipatory spaces, you must unearth yourselves. The text's final words, 'Naaleey.' Tomorrow.' are a promised renewal of transgression between Ammu and Velutha yet, also, a direct address and legacy bequeathed to the reader. We are asked not to replicate the text's atrocities but, rather, to explore potentially unnerving, liminal spaces. Roy's subversion of spatial thinking means that every individual must reconfigure their perspective of society, hopefully, in more equal terms.

Hannah Morris has recently graduated from Oxford University with a degree in English and is now volunteering in Spain with immigrants and refugees.

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# Keats's

# Lamia

## A Villainy Problem

Keats wrote 'Lamia' when he was desperately ill and knew that he was dying. Kate Ashdown uncovers his transgressive reworking of myth, undermining the legend's simple depiction of villainy.

### Lamiae

In his *Classical Dictionary*, Lemprière calls lamiae monsters and witches with 'the face and breast of a woman, and the rest of the body like that of a serpent' who 'allure strangers to come to them, that they might devour them'.

At first, Keats's Lamia fits this description beautifully:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,  
Vermilion- spotted, golden, green and blue;  
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,  
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred;  
I.47-50

The exotic richness of the colours signals the intensity of her power. She 'seemed.. Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.' Lamia is a monster with a plan: trapped as half-woman, half-snake, she bargains with Hermes to be released from her 'serpent prison-house' I.203. She sacrifices the nymph hiding from Hermes without hesitation – indeed her apparent kindness in hiding the nymph is actually a long term strategy to deceive.

### Complicating Ambiguities

Just as lamiae should do, Keats's Lamia traps her man but immediately complicated ambiguities take over and Keats leaves the simplicity of classical mythology's monsters far behind. We are not allowed the comfortable binaries of the lamiae of legend dividing the world simply into good and evil, black and white; instead Keats substitutes confusing and unsettling opposites when Lamia's serpent-self is hidden by Hermes:

A virgin purest lipped, yet in the lore of  
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core;  
Not one hour old, yet of scintial brain  
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain,  
I.189-192

The presentation of Lamia as an innocent virgin, deeply in love with Lycius, may be irresistible but she has not lost her witch's powers. She is an all-powerful huntress who teases, flirts, lies and Lycius is 'so tangled in her mesh' I.295. Her villainous strategy of deception is impressive:

Thus gentle Lamia judged, and judged aright,  
That Lycius could not love in half a fright,  
So threw the goddess off, and won his heart  
More pleasantly by playing a woman's part,  
I.334-7

### Taste, Fire and Power

Keats twists the lamiae of legend beautifully. Lamiae devour their victims but not here, or perhaps just not literally. Of all the five senses, Keats's imagery specialises in taste. The erotic intimacy of taste in the 'purple-stained mouth' from 'Ode on a Nightingale' and the 'strenuous tongue' in 'Ode On Melancholy' which

Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine

is echoed by the 'delicious' words of Lycius's first meeting with this 'smooth-lipped serpent'. Taste is the most intimate of senses but it is, of course, also a union only on the most aggressive and destructive of terms.

Another twist: it's not just Lamia devouring Lycius. Once their relationship is established, the switch of power is signalled in the sensual gustatory imagery:

And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,  
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,  
And still the cup was full –

I.251-23

This destructiveness is matched by the fire imagery throughout. Even Hermes is burnt by love and Lamia's transformation is hot chemistry, full of words like

sparks [...] lava [...] volcanian [...] inflamed.

The adjective 'bright' is used for Lycius several times and its dangerous firey nature is clear when he asserts his dominance over Lamia and

She burnt, she loved the tyranny.

II 80-81

### Love as a Tussle and a Cynical Trade

Keats cynically presents love as a power tussle. At first Lamia remains 'coy' and apparently innocent but she only seems timid and powerless because she 'saw his chain so sure' I.256. However, by Book II Lycius has taken over and she has ceded all control to him. He wants to parade her through the streets of Corinth as his 'prize' II.57. The materialism of the metaphor is brutal, as brutal as his refusal to listen to her pleas.

The ugliness of Lamia's ambush of Lycius, her deceitful disguise of her serpent self is matched by the presentation of love as a trade. The wedding itself is seen in financial terms: 'this mighty cost and blaze of wealth' and the bleak isolation of the lovers is ironically emphasised at the moment Lycius proposes marriage – to a woman whose name he has not thought to ask until this moment.

Indeed Keats's description of Lycius here is worth a closer look:

[...] he took delight  
Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.  
His passion, cruel grown, ....  
Fine was the mitigated fury, like  
Apollo's presence when in act to strike  
The serpent – Ha! The serpent! Certes, she  
Was none.

II.73-81

In the lines above Keats's intrusive narrator interrupts this moment of drama, the moment which shows explicitly how love has corrupted Lycius. The confident cynicism of the few authorial asides scattered through the poem recalls Byron. Here the reference to Apollo smiting a serpent is a shared joke with the reader. The most sustained moment of direct address is, of course, the opening of Part II with its bleak view of love and life, hints about the tragedy to come ('Had Lycius lived... II.7) and grim transformation of the God of Love into a roaring monster.

## Foreshadowing the Ending

As we can see from 'Isabella and the Pot of Basil', Keats is a master of prolepsis –

So the two brothers and their murdered man  
Rode past fair Florence

- and he deploys it powerfully here using rhetorical questions and the funereal imagery of wreaths to reinforce the inevitability of their deaths:

What wreath for Lamia? What for Lycius?  
What for the sage, old Apollonius?

II.221-222

Ah, the sage, old Apollonius. In Keats's source, Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy' III 2I I, Apollonius rescues Lycius. Keats reverses this completely: Apollonius supplants Lamia as the monster with 'some hungry spell' II.259; Lamia is destroyed and

...Lycius' arms were empty of delight,  
As were his limbs of life,...

II.30-309

The death of Lycius is caused by love – lost love – and he is buried in his 'marriage robe' II.311.

For a poem about love and marriage 'Lamia' is surprisingly full of endings – and both the ending of Part I and of Part II are deliberately and shockingly abrupt. True to the narrative



Swiss-born painter of love, and pale with pain, 1885.  
Contributor: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

pattern of tragedy, the cruel timing of the wedding intensifies the drama. However, it's worth noting that these lovers are divided ominously from the moment of Lycius's proposal and the transformation of Lamia from villain to victim begins then.

## Both Victim and Villain?

Some critics read Keats as over-romanticising women or infantilising them, even accusing him of a sexist undervaluing of women; Keats himself in one letter said:

The generality of women appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar than my time.

However, Lamia is clearly not one of the 'generality of women' and 'Lamia' is a feminist poem: it recognises the way society marginalises women. It's only with Lycius's proposal and so her successful integration into society that Lamia becomes powerless. Marriage, the way society organises and controls women, minimises Lamia and at the wedding Apollonius – symbol of the patriarchy – silences her first and then kills her with his fixed stare.

Indeed the re-identification of villain and victim in the final lines makes clear Keats's fight against a society that marginalises and abuses women. Lamia is the monster of myth and legend no more, she is a bride of 'alarmed beauty' (ll.247) whose eyes are full of a 'lovelorn piteous appeal' (ll.257); this 'sweet bride withers at' Apollonius's eyes' 'potency' (ll.290). This explicit presentation of 'tender-personed' Lamia (ll. 238) as a victim might remind us that from the beginning there was equivocation: this serpent might have been a 'penanced lady elf' (ll.55) and she claims that she was a woman – what had she done to call down a serpent curse? The mythological imagery Keats uses for Lamia also suggests victimhood: she is Ariadne in line 58 who was abandoned by Theseus and Proserpine in line 63 trapped in the Underworld with Hades for six months every year.

## Apollonius as Villain

If the presentation of Lamia is ambiguous, the tragic denouement's characterisation of Apollonius as the villain is indisputable. Lycius publically denounces him:

For all thine impious proud-heart sophistries,  
Unlawful magic and enticing lies.



Corinthians! Look upon that grey-beard  
wretch!

Mark how, possessed, his lashless eyelids  
stretch

Around his demon eyes!

ll. 285-289

Apollonius cruelly labels Lycius a 'fool', his voice 'gruff with contempt' ll.292, taking no notice of the suffering and pain of his student. He is now the demon, even a shape-shifter as his 'fixed eyes' suggest a snake. He is startlingly unsympathetic, approaching Lycius's situation as a 'knotty problem' (ll.160) and his laughter here is brutal in both its carelessness and egotism.

This wedding feast has become a battlefield:

Then Lamia breathed death-breath; the  
sophist's eye,

Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,

Keen, cruel, perçant, stinging:

ll. 299-301

This military description is masculine power at its most forceful and unfair – the list of four adjectives to describe his 'sharp spear' of an eye is overwhelming, particularly when the English language celebrates tricolons.

## Multiple Villains and Villainy

So who is the villain at the end: Lamia the serpent witch, Apollonius enjoying his moment of fatal glory or even Lycius who 'took delight/Luxurious in her sorrows' pushing harder for a wedding he can see upsets his bride-to-be? Could it even be Love itself, presented again and again as a violent and competitive conflict that divides?

While I am striving how to fill my heart

With deeper crimson, and a double smart?

How to entangle, trammel up and snare  
Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there  
Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose?

ll. 50-54

This is the moment to reference the Vale of Soul-Making and Negative Capability. Keats is a realist who rejects the fiction of romantic fantasies. He rejects the comforting binaries of good/evil, villain/hero too and dramatises the importance of not knowing – the power of 'uncertainties, mysteries and doubts', rather than

irritably reaching after fact and reason.

What is the collective noun for villains? It's an industry of villains – new to me but so appropriate here because Keats is industrious when it comes to inventing and multiplying villains and villainy in this poem.

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# Football Language

Anna Wexler does a close linguistic analysis of a football commentary, exploring metaphor, community of practice and bias in the France vs England Quarter Final match of the men's World Cup 2022.



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According to ITV, around 23 million people watched England lose to France in the quarter finals of the Qatar World Cup, making it the most watched programme on television in 2022. As it became increasingly clear that football wasn't going to be 'coming home' this year, my mind turned to linguistics. Football commentary, in general, is great to analyse, with many specific genre features to look for. But as well as considering its unusual grammatical structure (more on that below), what else might be interesting to look at?

## The Context

For this particular match, ITV showcased their lead commentator Sam Matterface, who was assisted by ex-player Lee Dixon. As an extremely experienced commentary duo, there was plenty for the language student to get their teeth into. Let's start by considering the role context played: this was a televised match so the commentator could safely assume that the audience were watching the coverage and therefore didn't need to be told exactly what was happening, as would be the case with radio commentary. The shared context resulted in a lot of **deixis** ( words or phrases which cannot fully be understood without extra contextual information) such as using pronouns 'it's a brilliant ball' or 'it's not the cleanest of headers' or determiners 'this is' to refer to the player currently with the

ball. Football moves fast, and therefore the commentary was often elliptical, sometimes consisting of just proper nouns listing the players as they passed to one another. This grammatical form is one of the key genre characteristics of many sports commentaries. However, with televised commentary, the lead commentator is meant to offer viewers a guiding hand through the match, not just point out what can be seen on the screen. This meant that in this match there were also many longer sections of speech which held interest.

## Metaphor

A very noticeable feature of sports commentary in general is the quantity of metaphor. Some of this can be explained because the aim is to give more detailed information to the audience about the action on the pitch. Instead of simply saying the ball was 'kicked', in this match there were verb phrases such as 'poke it through', 'send it back', 'squeeze it in' and 'flicked away' all of which give extra descriptive detail. There were also some amazing turns of phrase which helped to give personality to the commentator. My favourites in this match were the use of the noun 'nibble' to describe a defensive move, for example 'he has had a nibble...couldn't get hold of him' and 'another nibble on an England player' as well as the noun phrase 'the next cab off the rank' to describe a

potential substitution. The World Cup has a wider and more varied audience than many matches, including many people who don't normally watch football. These metaphors cater to all: most are understandable to even the novice sports enthusiast.

## Collocation

The skill of the commentator is both to engage the less knowledgeable in the match, and cater to a much more experienced fan. Therefore some metaphors used in this match were also very context dependent and could be seen as forming a specialized lexicon which could be harder for an outsider to decode. For example, when England prepared to take a corner in the last few minutes of the match, the commentator exclaimed

*there would never be a better time to find something off that set piece menu.*

The noun phrase 'set piece menu' could be described as a collocation – a group of words which are often used together. However this **collocation** is also very context-dependent, not appearing outside a sporting context. In this sense it is a form of jargon; if you don't watch much football then you might get the gist of its meaning (maybe thinking along the lines of a set menu in a restaurant), but will miss the substance: used in a footballing context this phrase specifically refers to



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manoeuvres used during a free kick, corner or other move which returns the ball to free play. A similar example is the potentially rather puzzling noun phrase used in these two quotes:

France are boarding the love train now

and

find a member of an England love train.

Hearing this metaphor, the general public may be reminded of an 80s R&B single, or puzzled by a rather fruity meaning found in the *Urban Dictionary*. In fact this is a reference to a turn of phrase used first by Glen Hoddle when he was commentating on a match in the 2018 World Cup in Russia, to describe a manoeuvre where the attacking players form a line in the opponent's penalty area. So are these specific footballing metaphors being used by Sam Matterface to exclude less experienced viewers? It seems a bit unlikely as ITV want to maximise their audience for these matches. Instead, as Susie Dent says in her book *Dent's Modern Tribes*,

if the coded lingo is our own, we won't often realise it's private at all.

## Community of Practice and Bias

The idea of a tribe is extremely close to the linguistic concept of a **community of practice**. The sociolinguist Penelope Eckert defines one of these as

an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavour. Ways of [...] talking [...] emerge in the course of their joint activity.

Although the commentator isn't engaged in exactly the same activity as those watching the match, they still share an emotional tie to what is happening on the pitch and as mentioned before, many of the audience share a high level of knowledge and experience of the game with him. Although ITV would probably claim that Matterface is providing a neutral commentary on the match, with Dixon adding the more analytical and perhaps partisan additions, there are some key moments in the commentary where subtle pro-England bias emerges. This would strengthen the idea that the majority of viewers and the commentator support the same side, and have formed a community of practice, influencing the language used by the commentator.

The first of the ways I feel a subtle bias is communicated is through the number of times that modal auxiliary and copular verbs are used to describe the potential feelings of players on the England side. For example, in just a short section of commentary Matterface says 'How England would love to....', 'England will feel....', 'England do not want....', 'England are feeling hard done by...' The lack of hedges in these (he doesn't say I think England will feel) mean these come across as confident statements of fact instead of inferences. We might be able to explain the lack of hedges as another elliptical feature of the commentary, however there is a second issue here: despite being relatively common features of the commentary when describing England's actions, there are very, very few focusing on France in this way. This gives the impression that the commentator (and his potential viewers) are very much in tune with only one side. The second feature which gives the impression of bias comes from one specific quote in the first half of the match when Matterface states that the referee and linesman 'have conspired to give' a foul against England. The verb phrase 'have conspired' implies a measure of unfair plotting which again subtly signals allegiance.

Interestingly towards the end of the game, once it seems likely that France will win, there is an attempt to neutralize the commentary again with the sentence

those with the England costumes hope there's something still in it for their team.

The possessive determiner 'their' and the rather distancing noun phrase 'those with the England costumes' is surprising given how focused the commentary has appeared to be on England up until this point. Perhaps this is to avoid seeming to downplay France's success.

## Media Backlash

A true community of practice involves all parties contributing linguistically in order to create an identity for themselves, and as Matterface is the only one with a microphone, this is where the application of this theory falls down a little. However what happened after the match was over was also interesting, as Matterface faced a media storm over a comment he had made in the commentary. Although the fans communicated their opinions through various social media channels, this

linguistic involvement might again allow us to see them as involved in the community of practice. As Harry Kane missed his second penalty shot, Matterface said 'they needed Gary Lineker and they got Chris Waddle'. Requiring specific footballing knowledge to decode, and therefore speaking only to the group of fans with this, this metaphoric quote was taken by many as an attack on an unfortunate player who had scored England's only goal in the match, by unfairly comparing him to Chris Waddle whose missed penalty in the semi-final of the 1990 World Cup resulted in England losing to West Germany. Enraged fans immediately took to social media to demand that ITV sack him. If membership of a community of practice requires 'mutual engagement in a common endeavour' then Matterface's criticism of an England player was clearly taken by some fans as signalling his rejection of this, and therefore his lack of suitability for the job.

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# Mrs Dalloway's Daughter

Though one might think of Elizabeth as a minor character in Woolf's novel, Cassie Westwood suggests that she plays a highly significant role, emphasising the limits of her mother's freedom and signalling that change is to come.

Clarissa Dalloway's daughter, Elizabeth, represents a number of different things in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). She is, at different times: a harbinger of the growing liberation enjoyed by some women in the 1920s, as shifts in British law and culture granted them more freedom and independence; the subject of a simmering personal war between Mrs Dalloway and Miss Kilman, as each strives to influence Elizabeth and covets her affection; an embodiment of modernity, one of the young for whom the norms and values of the Victorian past carry little weight or meaning; and, finally, a refracted aspect of Clarissa herself.

## The Context for Women

Later in her career, Woolf wrote two book-length essays exploring the challenges faced by women – especially women writers – in a male-dominated society. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) are focused particularly on the unspoken or invisible constraints imposed on women by patriarchal authority, on what eludes legal definition or remedy. This was, in part, because she was writing at a time when women's legal and social freedoms were unevenly but notably increasing. In 1918, the Representation of the People Act allowed women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification to vote; the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 attempted to prevent job candidates being disqualified from a position on the basis of their sex; the Law of Property Act (1925) granted wives the ability to inherit property equally with their husbands; and, in 1928, women were granted universal suffrage on the same terms as men.

## Clarissa and Elizabeth – Different Possibilities

Woolf wrote *Mrs Dalloway* in the midst of these changes, and we know that she was

well aware of them. However, her choice of protagonist means that their effects aren't always visible. Clarissa Dalloway is the middle-aged wife of a Conservative politician ('there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage', Peter Walsh drily observes), and she is repeatedly castigated, both by herself and others, for her ignorance on the pressing issues of the day:

people would say, 'Clarissa Dalloway is spoilt. She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians'.<sup>1</sup>

She is insulated from the public, political sphere that her husband Richard inhabits, 'like a nun who has left the world'.

Her daughter, Elizabeth, though, does provide Woolf with a way of acknowledging the burgeoning possibilities for women in education, politics, and work. In her outing with Miss Kilman, her tutor and companion, the older woman says to Elizabeth,

'Law, medicine, politics, all professions are open to women of your generation'

a promise that Elizabeth recalls only a few pages later, when she considers that 'she might be a doctor', 'a farmer', 'or possibly go into Parliament'. 'In short', she thinks to herself, 'she would like to have a profession'.

## Elizabeth's Identification with the Masculine World

In these moments, we see an important aspect of Elizabeth's developing identity, which is her identification with her father rather than her mother. Like Richard, Elizabeth wants to have a profession, to improve the world, and to participate in the public sphere of work, economics, and politics. She doesn't value her mother's domestic existence: hosting, visiting, sewing, buying flowers. In this, she is also aligned with another of the novel's male protagonists, Peter Walsh, whose bitterly

ironic remark that Clarissa is 'the perfect hostess' makes its target 'wince'. Elizabeth's ambitions align her more closely with what the novel depicts as a masculine rather than a feminine mindset, from which we might infer that such distinctions were less relevant, or less influential, for her generation.

Indeed, Elizabeth's rejection of the distinction between masculine and feminine occupations reflects a broader cultural change. According to the conventions of the Victorian society in which Woolf herself was raised, the spheres of public and private, political and domestic work were rigidly gendered as male and female respectively. The legislative and cultural changes described above illustrate that these outdated notions of 'men's work' and 'women's work' were challenged in the 1920s. For Elizabeth, a girl coming of age in this period, the notion that 'all professions are open' to her seems self-evidently true: she is able to take this for granted. Clarissa, however, is the product of an older generation –

in those days a girl brought up as she was, knew nothing

reflects Peter – and, as such, the freedom that Elizabeth takes as given seems to her mother daring, even alien.

## Elizabeth as Harbinger of Change

Elizabeth, then, is presented by Woolf as an embodiment of a new generation poised to displace the older, primed to participate in areas of public life that weren't open to Clarissa and her peers. Elizabeth is, in the narrator's words, 'a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting' (p. 98). But this characteristically asyndetic list might give us pause, since 'pioneer' and 'stray' are not synonymous. A pioneer strikes out boldly into unknown territory, as a single-minded



PHOTOGRAPH BY  
CHRISTOPHER GARDNER

vanguard of progress. Stray, though, conjures images of stray dogs and cats, as well as of waifs and strays: it suggests someone who is lost or without a home – either figuratively or literally. In other words, to be pioneer and stray simultaneously is to press forward into the future without a stable sense of the past. These words hint at a tension in Elizabeth’s position, as well as a tension in the new generation that she represents.

In fact, the juxtaposition of pioneering and straying would be one way of describing Woolf’s understanding of modernity, as well as its cultural manifestation, modernism. The early twentieth century was a time of rapid change, even revolution, in all areas of society: technology, economics, communication, science, politics, the arts. But while these changes brought with them exciting new possibilities, they also threatened to leave no trace of the world that had come before. In the words of the American political and cultural commentator, Marshall Berman:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, and transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.<sup>2</sup>

## The Omnibus – A Metaphor for Modernity

This sense of adventure, power, and transformation is palpable when Elizabeth takes her journey on the omnibus. She abandons Miss Kilman and boards it ‘in front of everybody’, conscious of her own boldness, and immediately feels as if on board ‘a pirate’. The omnibus is described as an ‘impetuous creature’ (not unlike Elizabeth herself at this moment), as well as:

reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously, boldly snatching a passenger, or ignoring a passenger, squeezing eel-like and arrogant in between, and then rushing insolently all sails spread up Whitehall.

The omnibus, in this moment, is an avatar of modernity – adventurous, ruthless, insolent – and Elizabeth’s embrace of these qualities is a sign of her embrace of modernity in its wider sense. While it ‘delight[s]’ Elizabeth ‘to be free’, we can’t help but hear in Woolf’s description the



Vanessa Redgrave in Mrs. Dalloway c. Marteen Gorris, 1997  
Contributor: Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo

negative consequences of this liberation: its ruthlessness, dangerousness, arrogance, and insolence.

## The Future and the Past

For all the concern with memory that Mrs Dalloway exhibits, Woolf’s inclusion of Elizabeth means that this novel is as concerned with the future as it is with the past. The constraints that Clarissa has faced will not be faced by her daughter, and so Woolf’s depiction of Elizabeth reveals the hope of a liberatory future for the next generation of women. At the same time, the language used to describe her implies some reservations on Woolf’s part: about the ruthlessness required to realise it, and what that future might leave behind.

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## Footnotes

1. See Trudi Tate’s exploration of Clarissa’s inability to distinguish between Armenia, Albania, and Turkey, in ‘Mrs Dalloway and the Armenian Question’, in *Modernism, History and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 166–72.
2. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1982), p. 15.

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# Intertextuality in Poems of the Decade

Teacher Adrian Blamires offers fresh insights into three of the poems in the Forward anthology, by Daljit Nagra, Ian Duhig and Andrew Motion, exploring their intimate relationship with other texts.

The Edexcel A Level English Literature specification does not require students to discuss context (AO3) when writing about contemporary post-2000 poetry, yet historical or biographical information is crucial to many of the selected works in *Poems of the Decade*: consider the importance of the 9/11 terrorist attack to John Burnside's 'History', say, or Seamus Heaney's Catholic upbringing to 'Out of the Bag'. Another significant consideration is literary context. Various poets draw upon other works of literature in an intertextual manner, and knowledge of a prior text as a source of inspiration or style model will often lead to a more complete understanding of the work at hand.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines intertextuality as

the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text.

## Poems by Turnbull and Thorpe

The most obvious example of intertextuality in the *Poems of the Decade* selection is Tim Turnbull's 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' which remodels John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', transforming the Romantic poet's meditation on desire and sacrifice in the ancient world into a serio-comic portrayal of the sexual and cultural mores of modern working-class youth; Turnbull also snipes at the (in his view) kitsch quality of Perry's art and hence brings into question Keats's transhistorical sense of 'truth and beauty'. Another example is found in Adam Thorpe's 'On Her Blindness', the title of which alludes to John Milton's sonnet 'On His Blindness'; the intertextual framework is less overt

here, but the tension between resentment and stoicism ('bear it/ like a Roman') in the face of affliction underpins both works, and the vague, tentative hope at the end of Thorpe's poem is a deliberately pale imitation of the Christian-stoic certitude with which Milton concludes.

In what follows, I focus on poems by Daljit Nagra, Ian Duhig and Andrew Motion – poems in which, judging by the most readily available commentaries, the intertextual elements remain relatively unexplored or even unknown.

## Daljit Nagra and Matthew Arnold

In 'Look We have Coming to Dover!' Daljit Nagra employs an epigraph from Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach':

So various, so beautiful, so new...

Arnold's poem is a masterpiece of Victorian doubt: the speaker, despite looking out on a tranquil coastal scene, on a world that seems 'a land of dreams', is haunted by the ebbing 'sea of faith', by human sadness, ignorance and violence. Nagra's choice of epigraph creates an ironic inversion: his speaker is an illegal immigrant smuggled into the country via a Dover beach, with England itself the promised land that lies ahead. But Nagra joins Arnold in expressing the disillusionment of those hoping for variety, beauty, a fresh start.

A 2009 UN investigation found that 20,000 youths from the Punjab attempted 'irregular migration' every year, with the UK the preferred destination for many. Presumably Nagra's speaker is one such, but the Britain he encounters is no 'land of dreams'. The

white cliffs are 'scummed'. Nature enacts the welcome the migrants might expect; their arrival sees them spat on ('gobfuls of surf phlegmed') and urinated on ('thunder unbladders/yobbish rain and wind'). What follows is a life on the margins, 'unlocked by the national eye', evading the authorities, but underpinning it is a hope that by some miracle they will be passported to legal status. And this is where Arnold's poem makes itself felt again: he famously turns to his love in his moment of crisis:

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another!

Nagra's intertextual spin on this –

Imagine my love and I,  
our sundry others

is for the migrant to consider his lover (and their extended families) joining him in dreamland, brought over to share in Tony Blair's Cool Britannia boom, becoming car owners and drinkers of bubbly, assimilated into the culture, whitened, 'flecked by the chalk' from their passage through Dover.

But this young man's lover remains, unlike Arnold's, half a world away. The poem's exclamatory upbeat ending is a forced, comfortless fantasy. Yet the Arnold epigraph resonates in another, more positive fashion: 'So various, so beautiful, so new' stands also for Nagra's linguistic vitality, his sparky protean Punglish (Nagra's term for the mix of Punjabi and English in his early work), his playful substratum reappropriation of English poetic tradition. The poem won the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem in 2004. With his neologisms and quicksilver syntax, Nagra gives mainstream voice to the marginalized, writes back to empire, finds a new mode of being true to one another.



I shall go into a hare,  
 With sorrow and sych [sighing] and meickle  
 [much] care;  
 And I shall go in the Devil's name,  
 Ay when I come home again.

Gowdie claimed to have been sent by the devil on an errand disguised as a hare, which underpins the story of 'The Lammas Hireling', at least from the speaker's (unreliable) point of view. Gowdie's confession may have supplied further inspiration for Duhig. The wife of a peasant-farmer, she claimed to have consorted sexually with the devil, and to have been provided with elf-made arrows to bring death to her victims. The latter detail is felt in the curse 'Now my herd's elf-shot', the former perhaps in the nakedness of the hireling out in the fields at night.

Gowdie also confessed to tormenting a zealously anti-witchcraft minister, a man who took part in her prosecution. In Duhig's poem, however, it is the farmer who makes confession, seemingly condemned to do so over and over, like the Ancient Mariner. The sin to which he confesses is a matter for conjecture – as well as the shooting of the hireling, my students have proposed the murder of his wife, or suppressed homoerotic desire. The hired man upon whom the 'cattle doted' seems a benign figure by comparison. Duhig offers a modern take on the occult, subverting religious and moral certainties in his mysterious fable.

### Andrew Motion and W. N. P. Barbellion

Many readers pick up on the somewhat prosaic and archaic texture of Andrew Motion's 'From the Journal of a Disappointed Man' but few (going by most online discussions and Edexcel's own teachers' guide) seem to be aware that is an example of found poetry.

Found poetry is defined in *Wikipedia* as 'a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases, and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them... by making changes in spacing and lines, or by adding or deleting text, thus imparting new meaning. The resulting poem can be defined as either treated: changed in a profound and systematic manner; or untreated: virtually unchanged from the order, syntax and meaning of the poem.'

### Ian Duhig and Isobel Gowdie

'The Lammas Hireling', Ian Duhig's classic dramatic monologue, is steeped in the lore and legends of witchcraft, relating in particular to shapeshifting. On seeing his hired man with his leg in a fox-trap, the farmer-speaker says 'I knew him a warlock, a cow with leather horns', which alludes to an Irish riddle about a hare:

A hopper of ditches,  
 A cropper of corn,  
 A wee brown cow  
 With two leather horns.

The farmer believes his hired man has transformed into a hare, a creature

frequently associated in folklore with witches, with the moon goddess and fertility, with hermaphroditism, and with having a haunting human timbre to its distress-cry. All of this is relevant to Duhig's poem given the doubled yields in the hireling's time, the moon's witness of his murder and metamorphosis, and the way that his pained cries blend with the 'torn voice' of the farmer's late wife in a dream.

In intertextual terms, Duhig's primary source – alluded to in

To go into the hare gets you muckle sorrow,  
 The wisdom runs, muckle care

is the shapeshifting incantation of Isobel Gowdie, a Scottish woman who confessed in 1662 to practising witchcraft:



Andrew Motion found the text in *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* (1919) by W. N. P. Barbellion, the pen-name for the naturalist, Bruce Frederick Cummings (1889-1919). Motion acknowledges the source in his collection *The Cinder Path*, but it goes unacknowledged in the *Poems of the Decade* anthology. The relevant section (printed opposite) comes at a point in 1913 not long after Barbellion felt the onset of the multiple sclerosis from which he would die a few years later. He is convalescing in a seaside resort when he witnesses a group of labourers working on the pier, and we may detect some consciousness of his own waning strength in his fascination with the 'powerful men'.

In comparing the poem with the prose journal entry, my students have tended, initially at least, to see Motion as a bit of a cheat – isn't untreated found poetry simply a way of legitimizing plagiarism? But a near-consensus has then emerged that Motion creates new meaning, for example with his use of caesura and enjambment. In describing the wooden pile as

a massive affair, swinging  
over the water

the white space on the page after the verb enacts a sense of suspension, which ties in with the ending, where Motion – in perhaps his most significant change to or treatment of Barbellion's text – throws emphasis on the isolated, in-limbo condition of the speaker:

That left  
the pile still in mid-air, and me of course

Motion's voice is superimposed on Barbellion's here, and the whole incident arguably becomes a symbol of human (or masculine) failure and incomprehension in a way that Barbellion was perhaps not conscious of in recording it.

## Using Intertextual Knowledge

How might this intertextual knowledge be of use to students? Well, it's a matter of genre, which is important when it comes to AO1 ('concepts and terminology') and AO2 ('writer's craft'): just as it helps to know that Turnbull works in the tradition of the ekphrastic ode, or that Sinéad Morrissey creates a variation on the villanelle form in 'Genetics', we should recognize Motion's found poetry mode. Knowing the source explains the archaic elements in the poem,

## Extract from *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* (1919) by W. N. P. Barbellion

Entry for June 5, 1913:

June 5.

A New Pile in the Pier

Watched some men put a new pile in the pier. There was all the usual paraphernalia of chains, pulleys, cranes, and ropes, with a massive wooden pile swinging over the water at the end of a long wire hawser. Everything was in the massive style—even the men—very powerful men, slow, ruminative, silent men.

Nothing very relevant could be gathered from casual remarks. The conversation was without exception monosyllabic: 'Let go,' or 'Stand fast.' But by close attention to certain obscure movements of the man on the ladder near the water's edge, it gradually came thro' to my consciousness that all these powerful, silent men were up against some bitter difficulty. I cannot say what it was. The burly monsters were silent about the matter.... In fact they appeared almost indifferent—and tired, oh! so very tired of the whole business. The attitude of the man nearest me was that for all he cared the pile could go on swinging in mid-air to the crack of Doom.

They continued slow, laborious efforts to overcome the secret difficulty. But these gradually slackened and finally ceased. One massive man after another abandoned his post in order to lean over the rails and gaze like a mystic into the depths of the sea. No one spoke. No one saw anything not even in the depths of the sea. One spat, and with round, sad eyes contemplated the trajectory of his brown bolus (he had been chewing) in its descent into the water.

The foreman, an original thinker, lit a cigarette, which relieved the tension. Then, slowly and with majesty, he turned on his heel, and walked away. With the sudden eclipse of the foreman's interest, the incident closed. I should have been scarcely surprised to find him behind the Harbour-master's Office playing 'Shove-ha'penny' or skittles with the pile still swinging in mid-air.... After all it was only a bloody pile.

Extract taken from Project Gutenberg online edition:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/39585/pg39585-images.html>

The work is available from Penguin: <https://www.penguin.co.uk/authors/130531/w-n-p-barbellion>  
Details of Isobel Gowdie's confessions are found at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isobel\\_Gowdie#Confessions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isobel_Gowdie#Confessions)

and while most of the 'untreated' description is Barbellion's, the organizational principle (unrhymed quatrains; an approximation of iambic pentameter) is very much Motion's own. Should the poem come up in the exam, I have advised my students to call it a found poem, giving the source and a brief statement about Barbellion, then to analyse stylistic devices as they would for any other poem, albeit with an additional sense of how Motion reshapes the original prose to create new meaning.

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Gemma Arterton in *The Duchess Of Malin*, The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, 2014.  
Contributor: Bettina Strenske / Alamy Stock Photo

# Power, Stewardship and the Language of the Market in *The Duchess of Malfi*

A Level teacher Alban Miles argues that Webster's play is obsessed with status, money and material possessions and that Antonio and Bosola's low birth is central to the tragedy that plays out.

At the start of the fifth act of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Antonio asks Delio:

**What think you of my hope of reconciliation to the Aragonian brethren?**

Delio is not optimistic, and the audience might feel that Webster is stretching dramatic irony too far. Even without our superior knowledge (the question follows the scene in which the Duchess is strangled) surely Antonio cannot be so naïve as to imagine Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal will accept him as their legitimate brother-in-law? This scene is often cut in performance, as with Dominic Dromgoole's candlelit 2014 production at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in London. Understandably so – after Gemma Arterton's lifeless Duchess is carried out by Sean Gilder's conscience-stricken Bosola, talk of forgiveness and 'letters of safe conduct to Milan' seems a bit like a wind-up. So why did Webster include it?

The simplest answer is dramatic juxtaposition. As Shakespeare follows Ophelia's tragic death with the malapropisms of the Gravediggers, so Webster's dark and mordant wit has Antonio and Delio talk business straight after such a brutal, dramatically intense scene. But I would argue that what is more interesting about the scene is Webster's use of language to focus us on Antonio's struggle to hold onto his land. 'I cannot think', says Delio,

**They mean well to your life**

**That do deprive you of your means of life,  
Your living.**

These lines are a close paraphrase of Shylock's response to the duke's judgment in *The Merchant of Venice*

**Nay, take my life and all...you take my life  
When you do take the means whereby I live**

and the repetition of 'life...living' is emphatic. Like Shakespeare, Webster is interested in the dramatic and political potential of the language of the market, in mobility and social striving. As Antonio puts it, in a sententia at the end of the scene, 'calling' and 'falling'. Whether it is the Duchess' attempt to live her own life, the different ways Antonio and Bosola aim to 'thrive some way', or the attempts of the noble brothers to maintain control, Webster's play is obsessed with status, money and material possessions.

## **'Crabbed Websterio, the playwright-cartwright – whether? either!'**

Webster's mother was a blacksmith's daughter and his father, also John, a prosperous carriage maker. Though he came from a relatively wealthy family, and was well-educated, the playwright John Webster was himself socially mobile – moving away from his father's manual trade towards the life of the mind. If the words in the subheading above (from Henry Fitzgeffery's *Satyres and Satyricall Epigrams*, 1617) are anything to go by, Webster was not allowed to forget his origins: Fitzgeffery implies he lacked the courtly poise, and perhaps the connections, of some of his fellow playwrights.

## **Webster's Treatment of the Sources**

In *The Infortunate Marriage of A Gentleman* (1567, William Painter's Antonio Bologna is endowed with aristocratic courtly virtue. As 'Master of the Household' to the King of Naples he is 'valiant', a 'good man of war', a skilled speaker, writer, musician, horseman – not forgetting his

'comely' appearance. Painter presents Antonio more as tragic hero than as servant – after the King is exiled and Antonio loses his job, it is his 'devout' affection to the House of Aragon that dooms him to fall into an 'infortunate' liaison with the widowed Duchess of Malfi, a relative of his former employer.

Webster is far more interested than Painter in the functional aspects of Antonio's role as the Duchess' Steward. Both the Duchess and Bosola use this word to address Antonio; it is also the word chosen by Edward Grimeston, whose English translation from the French of Simon Goulart's version of the story was published in London in 1607. Webster seems to have used many plot details related by Goulart, and – most importantly, perhaps – to share Goulart's interest in the material outcomes. In Goulart's telling the Cardinal and Ferdinand

**caused Bologna's goods at Naples to be confisked**

dramatised by Webster in Act 5, Scene 1 – before he is ambushed and killed. As in Webster's play, the young son of Antonio and the Duchess survives – but Goulart states that he was forced to flee Milan, to

**change his name, and to retire himself far off, where he died unknown.**

In contrast, at the end of Webster's play, Delio hopes to

**establish this young hopeful gentleman  
In 's mother's right.**

However unlikely it seems, leaving open the possibility that this boy – born of such an 'unequal marriage' – could become legitimate in status and ownership, is a radical gesture.



Gemma Arterton in 'The Duchess Of Malfi,' The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, 2014  
Contributor: Bettina Strenske / Alamy Stock Photo

## Antonio the Steward

In early modern English the word 'Steward' can mean both 'majordomo' (in charge of the domestic and administrative aspects of a household) and 'bailiff' (including more executive and judicial duties – managing estates on behalf of an owner, transacting financial and legal business on their behalf.) A Steward often acted as mediator and broker, connecting a great house or estate to the local environment (and thus to the market). During the sixteenth century, feudal obligations were increasingly displaced by contractual or overtly economic relations between masters and servants – the nature of property and social relations, as well as structures of service, were changing. This made the Steward a more potent – and thus potentially unstable or subversive – social and political entity. As D.R. Hainsworth claims in his book *Stewards, Lords and People*, 'the Stuart era saw [the Steward] rise to far greater prominence.'

When the Duchess reveals the identity of her new husband to Bosola, his reply is designed to flatter her:

Do I not dream? Can this ambitious age  
Have so much goodness in 't as to prefer

A man merely for worth, without these  
shadows

Of wealth and painted honours?

Yet spoken by Bosola, these comments on Antonio cannot be wholly empty. Ironically (for the two must keep fatal secrets from one another) they are cut from the same cloth – both relatively 'low-born', both ambitious, both able. Bosola is a scholar turned spy; Antonio Steward of a great estate. While both Ferdinand and his more strategic brother the Cardinal misjudge and underestimate both men, they often speak about each other with insight. Not only are they rivals for the Duchess' intimacy, they are also interdependent, dramatically and socially:

BOSOLA: You are a false steward.

ANTONIO. Saucy slave, I 'll pull thee up by  
the roots.

BOSOLA. Maybe the ruin will crush you to  
pieces.

Interestingly, Ferdinand's epithet for Antonio is not 'Steward' but 'Our sister duchess' great-master of her household.' As well as being a mouthful, this phrase is notable for the way it attempts to confine and circumscribe Antonio's role. When he finally discovers the truth, the Duke derides Antonio as 'a slave that only smell'd of

ink and counters' and never 'look'd like a gentleman' except during the 'audit-time.' But such dismissive disgust only stands up when Antonio can be kept securely at arms' length – used and abused for practical skills, then disposed of ruthlessly. In this case, the 'slave' has become the Duke's brother-in-law, and as such, holds claims over the Duchess' entire estate. In the context of the decline of feudal obligations, growing scepticism about the absolute power of monarchs, and the rise of economic relations driven by market forces, the joke isn't funny anymore.

## Feudal Lands and Power

It is worth returning to Act 5, Scene 1 to examine the way Delio describes Antonio's lands, and what he has discovered is happening to them.

The Marquis of Pescara,  
Under whom you hold certain land in cheat,  
Much 'gainst his noble nature hath been  
mov'd

To seize those lands;

The custom of holding land 'in cheat' was feudal: the term 'escheat' derives from the Latin *ex-cadere*, to 'fall-out': if a piece of

land 'falls-out' of the possession of a tenant (usually due to the lack of an heir, or their arrest), the land reverts to the Crown, or Prince, or Lord – in this case the Marquis of Pescara. We witness the feudal process by which the Cardinal's mistress Julia is 'invested' (at the great Cardinal's request) with Antonio's asset, the 'Citadel of Saint Benedict', by the Marquis of Pescara. We know already that Julia, though socially ambitious, is not a threat to the Cardinal's power. She is herself a kind of asset, holding the land in name to deny it to Antonio – everything is still controlled by the Cardinal. Here is the unlimited and tyrannising potential of feudal power in action, as Pescara himself confirms:

It was Antonio's land, not forfeited

By course of law but ravish't from his throat

By the Cardinal's entreaty.

## The Language of the Marketplace

Webster uses many words suggesting the rigged system of absolutism and feudal power relations in the scene – 'poor petitioner', 'ill beggar' 'in cheat', 'ravish't', 'entreaty', 'salary for his lust'. But this register is balanced here, and outweighed in the wider play, by the language of the marketplace. It is the 'dependents' of the

Marquis who are making their 'suit' to be 'invested' in Antonio's' revenues. These men – perhaps ambitious social climbers themselves – are competing for Antonio's assets. In a scene that seems to provide evidence of the crushing power of the Cardinal, it seems strange that the word 'friend' is used six times.

This might reveal Pescara's misgivings about what he is being forced to do by the Cardinal. It could recall the exhilarating scene in which the Duchess 'woos' Antonio by using the language of the market to subvert feudal valorisation of honour and female chastity. And it should remind us that, in the world of the market, 'worth' is not measured by birth. As the Duchess tells Antonio:

This dark'ning of your worth is not like that  
Which tradesmen use i' the city; their false  
lights

Are to rid bad wares off: and I must tell you,  
If you will know where breathes a complete  
man

(I speak it without flattery), turn your eyes,  
And progress through yourself.

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Sarah Mcrae, Gemma Arterton and Alex Waldmann in *The Duchess Of Malfi*, The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, 2014  
Contributor: Reuters / Alamy Stock Photo  
Photographer: Luke Macgregor



## Significant Sentences

Professor Nicolas Tredell analyses the ways in which individual sentences can work powerfully in novels and short stories, drawing on a wonderful range of A Level texts to exemplify and explain his ideas.

# Narrative

# Prose

Eddie Redmayne in *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles* (2008). Directed By David Blair.  
Credit: BBC / Album. Contributor: Album / Alamy Stock Photo

Story, plot, dialogue, point of view and character are key elements of the novel and short story; but the most essential element is the style of the narrative prose – its vocabulary and word-order, its rhythm and resonance. One strategy for exploring style is to focus on the individual sentence. In such an exploration, it will always be crucial to grasp how a particular sentence relates to the broader units of a fiction such as paragraphs and chapters, and to the work as a whole; but the analysis of significant sentences, in their contexts, can offer deeper insights into how a fictional narrative works. We consider here four major functions of sentences in fiction: as beginnings, anticipations, crystallizations and endings.

## Beginnings

The first sentence of a novel can set its tone and signal the kind of fictional world we are about to enter. For example:

*Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him.*

This is how Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938) opens. The sentence starts by introducing a character by name, locating him in a specific place and providing a marker of time: all standard procedures in realist fiction. But the final clause introduces a different note, tipping the reader into a fictional world of mortal threat and into a specific genre of fiction: the thriller. *Brighton Rock* was one of those novels that Greene originally termed entertainments which used popular genres to dramatize and explore serious themes.

A novel published eleven years later also has a dramatic opening sentence:

*It was a bright, cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.*

This is the beginning of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The title has already cued the reader into the idea that this fiction will be set in a future that, when it was first published, was about 35 years distant; but its first sentence inducts the reader into a familiar world by summarizing the weather, broadly indicating the time (day, not night), and naming the month. With the mention of clocks, it seems about to specify the time more precisely. But when it does so, in the last word of the sentence, it disrupts expectations; in the familiar world of 1949 or 2023, clocks do not strike thirteen. This anomaly heralds a world that is familiar but strange in one fundamental way – and the novel will go on to show the many other ways it deviates from the current reality of its readers while also extrapolating from it. Both these examples indicate that an opening sentence can do a great deal of work.

## Anticipations

We can now move on to sentences that occur not at the very start of a fiction, but in its early stages and which anticipate what is to come. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) opens quietly, with one of its narrators, Lockwood, arriving in an unfamiliar district. Early signs of disturbance soon start to accumulate, however, and culminate in Lockwood's harrowing experience in Chapter 3 as he lies at night

in a bedroom in *Wuthering Heights* (the house). This sentence occurs after he has grasped the little, ice-cold hand of a child outside the window and hears its pleas to be let in.

*Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious gripe [sic], almost maddening me with fear.*

This turns out to be a nightmare; but it anticipates the cruelty, terror, abuse and suffering that will characterize the novel's unsparing dramatisation of the dark dynamics of human relationships. Like Greene, Emily Brontë uses a popular genre – in this case, Gothic fiction – to explore serious themes.

An anticipation of a different set of dynamics occurs in Chapter 3 of Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), a novel made up of four deeply felt and skilfully differentiated first-person narratives. This sentence from Hortense's narrative in Chapter 3 vividly evokes the simultaneous impacts of a hurricane in Jamaica and her realization that Michael, with whom she has grown up and has now fallen in love, is intimately involved with another woman:

*At that moment, I wanted to burst from the room, to blow through the windows, to blast through the walls, and escape into the embrace of the dependable hurricane.*

Though set in the Caribbean rather than northern England, the meteorological climate of this sentence is close to that of scenes in *Wuthering Heights*, or indeed in Shakespeare's plays, in which the turbulence of the natural elements and of human emotions mirror and magnify each other. There is, however, an exuberance and energy in the rhythm and vocabulary of Levy's sentence that testifies to Hortense's resilience and anticipates the challenges that she will face when she goes to live in a Mother Country where the bleak winds of a hostile environment blow.

## Crystallisations

Here is a sentence that captures a moment of crystallisation in Chapter 47 of the novel in which it features:

*It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself! (398)*

Faye Dunaway and Natasha Richardson in *The Handmaid's Tale*, d. Volker Schlöndorff, 1989. Contributor: United Archives GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo





Anya Taylor-Joy in *Emma* (2020). © Autumn De Wilde. Credit: Working Title Films / Album  
Contributor: Album / Alamy Stock Photo





Big Brother is Watching, 1984, 1956  
Contributor: Alamy Picture Library Limited.  
(Alamy Stock Photo)



This is from Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) and it occurs just after Emma has grasped that her friend and protégée, Harriet Smith, has a keen interest in Mr Knightley as a possible husband that he seems, at least partly, to reciprocate. This almost instantly crystallises Emma's intense desire for Mr Knightley and her determination to have him for herself.

The image of the arrow is a conventional one, alluding to ancient Greek mythology and the figure of Cupid who caused confusion by shooting darts, or arrows, into humans with his bow to make them fall in love, often with the wrong people.

But here Austen embeds the allusion into a concise, concentrated sentence that captures, with force and precision, a moment of recognition that marks a change of fortune and foreshadows a happy ending.

A sentence in Chapter 36 of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) crystallises a turning-point that foreshadows an unhappy ending, summarising the grounds of Angel Clare's absolute rejection of Tess as a future wife after she has acknowledged that she is, in his terms, impure because she has been seduced – or, less euphemistically, raped.

*Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical*

deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it.

The simile in this sentence draws on Hardy's closeness to the agricultural world of rural Dorset; Clare's intransigence is hard as a metallic deposit, concealed in soft soil, which resists the blade of any plough. But the adjective logically identifies the obstacle as not simply a natural impediment but as the product of a fixed set of ideas about what is right and wrong that enables Clare to justify an action that is, in ethical terms, cruel and leads to an unhappy ending.

## Endings

Charles Dickens found it difficult to end *Great Expectations* (1861). He changed his original downbeat ending several times and eventually came up with this, in which Pip and Estella leave the ruins of Satis House:

*I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.*

This last sentence stops short of the unequivocal happy ending many readers



Leonie Elliott, David Webber, Sandra James-Young, Flo Wilson and Elliot Barnes-Worrell in *Small Island* (c) Johan Persson

have desired, in which Pip and Estella would marry. 'I saw no shadow of another parting from her' may foretell their union in holy matrimony but may also signal Pip's renewed self-enmeshment in great expectations that are estranged from reality, especially as the sentence immediately follows Estella's affirmation that they will – and, implicitly, must – continue as friends apart.

By the 1920s, however, downbeat endings fitted the mood of the times, as in this example:

**After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain.**

This final sentence of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) might, in other contexts, excite little attention. But here it resonates strongly. In this novel set in Italy and Switzerland during and after World War One, the English nurse Catherine Barkley is the true love of the protagonist and first-person narrator Frederic Henry, former US Ambulance Corps lieutenant turned deserter; but she has just died in a Lausanne hospital from complications following the delivery of their still-born baby. The understated last sentence deepens, by contrast, the poignancy of the double loss.

Hemingway, however, struggled even harder with the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* than Dickens did with that of *Great Expectations*, producing around 47 different versions before he found one that satisfied him: a struggle that exemplifies the importance of significant sentences in fiction, whether at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end.

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*A Farewell To Arms*, Gary Cooper, Helen Hayes, 1932  
Photographer: Courtesy Everett Collection



make along the way. We never really know if we have got it right. In 'Skin', there is a reference to the festive events which didn't happen in his youth:

And pardon me, that I  
Could find, when you were new,  
No brash festivity to wear you at.  
Roads not taken

Several poems in *The Less Deceived* describe things not happening, roads not taken, moments where we turn away from risk and adventure and stay with the familiar. 'Wires' describes a prairie where the cattle do not stray: once the young steer might have attempted to leave, but the pain of the electric fence taught them to stay with the familiar. They

become old cattle from that day.

The cattle might be read as a symbol for the humans in poems who similarly seek security in the known. 'Poetry of Departures' plays with the idea of heading out into the unknown like the man who 'just chucked everything' and for a while looks admiringly, and humorously, at those who live by their wits, contrasting it with the drearily familiar:

I detest my room,  
Its specially-chosen junk.

But in the end it is life within the fence that is preferred, even if it is a kind of nothing,

a life

Reprehensibly perfect.

'Toads' follows the same line of thought. The speaker considers the temptation of chucking in the day job but in the end sees this promise of escape and excitement as an illusion:

that's the stuff

That dreams are made on.

Living within the fence, stepping back instead of venturing forth, is an important theme in *The Less Deceived*. It is a kind of anti-adventure book. In 'Reasons for Attendance' the speaker peers through the window of a club where young people are dancing and reflects on his reasons for not joining in this world of music and passion, preferring the call of Art and individuality: 'Therefore I stay outside'. The window is a border between two kinds of life. But there is an uncertainty about the decision to stay outside:

and both are satisfied,  
If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied.

Perhaps, it is implied, no one ends up being quite satisfied with the life they decide on. In 'Arrivals, Departures', the inhabitants of a coastal town hear the call of the ships, beckoning them to another world,

Calling the traveller now, the outward bound.

The 'traveller' could be the person who chucks everything in and takes to a life on the road, or who joyously joins in the music and dancing or shouts 'Stuff your pension!' But what is the right course of action? To heed the call, or stay with what we know? By doing nothing, we may be losing the chance of happiness:

And we are nudged from comfort, never  
knowing

How safely we may disregard their blowing,  
Or if, this night, happiness too is going

## Disappointments

Even when things do happen in *The Less Deceived*, they quickly fade or turn out to be disappointments. 'Whatever happened?' begins by referring to some significant event that has recently taken place – an accident at sea? A fight on shore? – but then describes the way it diminishes with time: 'At once whatever happened starts receding'. The poem suggests that we feel safer away from big events, in a place where 'All's kodak-distant'. Perhaps, deep down, we yearn for oblivion.

'Triple Time' describes the passage of life from the vantage point of the dull present:

This empty street, this sky to blandness  
soured.

It is another place where nothing happens, 'A time unrecommended by event'. But once it was a place we looked forward to as children,

An air lambent with adult enterprise

and one day we will look back on it as a  
time of missed opportunity,

A valley cropped by fat neglected chances.

The poem evokes life as a series of non-events, of things not happening.

And the great events we hope for in the future, the things that might give us some excitement, will turn out to be non-events too. In 'Next, Please' these imagined future moments are symbolised as ships making towards us, a 'Sparkling armada of promises' like a scene from a film. Yet they only

leave us holding wretched stalks

Of disappointment

knowing the only future event we can  
count on is death.

## Fulfilment's Desolate Attic

One particular kind of non-event in *The Less Deceived* is sex. 'Dry-point' addresses sexual desire, describing it as a bubble which imprisons us and drives us to desperation. But even when sex does take place, the result is immediate disappointment: 'What ashen hills! what salted, shrunken lakes!' We yearn to be released from this desire, this 'irritant', for an unreachable utopia which is a kind of nothingness, 'that bare and sunscrubbed room' where sexual need cannot enter. This idea recurs in 'Deceptions', which first addresses the victim of a rape in Victorian London. The poet imagines her traumatic state with vivid sensitivity, then considers the rapist: driven by sexual desire to that appalling act, he feels no satisfaction, but instead 'Bursts into fulfilment's desolate attic'. So he, too, is deceived. This is a controversial poem, as it seems to be inviting us to feel some kind of sympathy for the rapist; but the idea of fulfilment leading at once to desolation is consistent with other poems.

## A Poem is an Event

So, are the poems of *The Less Deceived* a gloomy meditation on nothing, on life without joy, risk, adventure? There is no denying that the collection does go into some very dark areas – the affliction of 'Myxamatoxis', the description of death creeping up in 'Going'. But all is not gloom. For one thing, there is the poetry itself. Even when describing something that didn't happen, a poem is still in itself an event, an episode of awakening in which a feeling is articulated in precise language.

## Thinking, Looking

And within the writing, there is an attention to craft, which is quite the opposite of 'nothing'. Poems take us on avenues of thought in sentences which gracefully unfurl across lines and stanzas. The writing, with its cadences, rhymes and rhythms, registers thoughts and feelings with a precision which is uplifting, even when the subject is bleak. There are those moments, heavy with adjectives, where we feel a speaker thinking through an idea, for instance:

This audacious, purifying,  
Elemental move,



Another such example might be:

a skilled,

Vigilant, flexible,

Unemphasised, enthralled

Catching of happiness.

Larkin's speakers are themselves vigilant and enthralled, even when the object of their interest is bleak.

This interest is apparent in the wonderful descriptive power of the writing. The poems give us compact, sensuous phrases which bring the world before us: 'sprawlings of flowers', 'the dancers [...] Shifting intently, face to flushed face', 'The sun's occasional print', 'a bird's adept splay'. Any short story writer would have been proud to come up with these (and we remember that Larkin started his literary career as a novelist). The collection begins with a poem about a photograph album, in which the camera is admired for its unsentimental view of things. It

records

Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds.

Larkin's poetry does something similar, taking a level look at life, suspicious of anything fake or sentimental, but at the same time taking everything in.

## The Numinous

And, just sometimes, there is a different sense of 'nothing', numinous moments like the sun between clouds. There are the tender feelings of love in 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' – 'it holds you like a heaven' – or the cautious blessing of 'Born Yesterday', the joy of the wife in 'Wedding Wind', or the beautiful evocation of happiness in 'Coming'. Living within a limited space, away from action, need not be so bad. The retired race horses in 'At Grass' 'gallop for what must be joy' in their little field. These moments are all the more precious for being rare. *The Less Deceived* shows us that through poetry we can look outward, go beyond the wires of the compound in our imagination. Like the photos in the album, the world is always worth looking at, and thinking about. Even when nothing is happening, in the attentive mind there is always something going on.

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# THE EXCLUSION ZONE



Anna Paquin in Jane Eyre, 1996  
Contributor: Movestore Collection Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

## The Alienated Narrator in *Klara and the Sun* and *Jane Eyre*

What could two such different novels have in common? Judy Simons suggests more than one might think, their two unconventional narrators able to offer an equally powerful critique of their different worlds.

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.

This opening sentence, short, flat and decidedly negative, introduces *Jane Eyre*, one of the most celebrated novels in the English literary canon. It at once locates the reader in the consciousness of the book's juvenile heroine, and the paragraphs which follow intensify that initial sense of deprivation. Not only is she forced into inactivity because of the rain, but Jane is then excluded from the charmed family circle clustered around the drawing-room fire. Summarily dismissed from the picturesque tableau of seeming happiness, she is relegated to the role of bystander, denied both action and agency. From behind the window curtains in the adjoining room, she occupies a no-man's-land of surveillance, as she watches the outside world through

the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day.

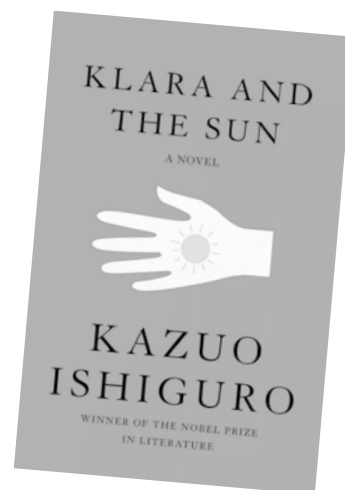
'Protecting but not separating' – it is a crucial distinction. Jane remains a part

of the world she observes while not yet exposed to its dangers. Soon she will encounter these directly. And while readers are encouraged to identify with her perception, it quickly becomes evident that her vision is obscured, for

folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand.

This narrator can see only a part of the picture beyond the window, a reflection of her limited and solipsistic ten-year old perspective. It takes the rest of the novel for her vision to turn to comprehension and for exclusion to be transformed into full acceptance as she ultimately becomes the agent of her own future.

At first glance, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* could hardly be more different from this realistic nineteenth-century bildungsroman. It is a futuristic fiction, set in an America where industrialisation has created everyday referents, such as skyscrapers, computers and plastics, familiar to modern readers but that would



utterly mystify Charlotte Brontë. Yet there are some surprising correspondences between these two books, written over two hundred and fifty years apart. And despite the huge gaps across time, place and culture, they share a value system that promotes humanity, kindness and love, the natural virtues which their authors present as being under threat.

The literary critic, Wayne Booth, in his 1961 *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, coined the term 'unreliable narrator' to describe the technique whereby the narrative persona is distinct from that of an omniscient author who establishes the moral parameters of the fictional world and who knows where the story is heading. From Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) to Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) and Yann Martell's *Life of Pi* (2001), narrators are shown to be variously cynical, manipulative, duplicitous, naive and delusional. It is up to the reader to unravel the clues and work out the 'truth' as the plot unfolds. Ironically, it is by virtue of their limited vision that the alienated narrators of both *Jane Eyre* and *Klara and the Sun* also expose the dysfunctional society they inhabit and struggle to come to terms with.

In Ishiguro's novel, Klara's voice exhibits a similar combination of estrangement and naivety to that of Jane Eyre, and the opening echoes the Brontë trope of the young 'girl' looking through a window from a position of security to the world beyond.

**When we were new, Rosa and I were mid-store, on the magazines table side, and could see through more than half the window. So we were able to watch the outside.**

Plunged into media res, the reader cannot immediately identify who is speaking. The term 'new' normally refers to an object rather than a human being, and being able to see through 'more than half the window' is hardly the mark of achievement suggested here.



It gradually becomes apparent that Klara's vision is determined by a series of geometric prisms, 'a diagonal line', 'a triangle', 'a rectangle', which are modified as her view is affected by her position or the movement of light and shadow. Further rhetorical incongruities emerge as random objects are personified by capitalisation: the Red Shelves, the Glass Table, the Striped Sofa, and the definite article is arbitrarily ascribed, for example to 'the Mother' but not 'Manager'. And although later in the novel, they become longer and more nuanced, Klara's early sentence constructions are short, simple and careful, a computerised version of language that plays by (some of) the grammatical rules.

These narrators, who initially can see only a section of the world beyond, resist the predetermined programme imposed on them by a controlling and sharply divided society. It's important to remember that Jane's voice was as surprising to its contemporary audience as Klara the robot's voice is today. One 1848 reviewer was outraged by Jane's 'coarseness of language and a laxity of tone', condemning her

**tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine.**

Similarly, whilst we are all used to being in a shop, we are not accustomed to hearing the merchandise analysing and interpreting, let alone challenging, our behaviour.

**'Klara you are quite remarkable. You notice and absorb so much'**

says Manager admiringly. Like Jane Eyre, Klara is an ingenuous but vigilant witness

to the pitfalls of a society that prioritises logic over empathy. Ishiguro's fantastic imaginings are closer to twenty-first century reality than many might assume. Generation Z may accept Alexa, Siri and the disembodied voices of satnav systems issuing instructions, but has not yet fully embraced the implications of, for example, Character AI or Re;memory, a DeepBrain product whereby a realistic avatar of a dead person can speak convincingly to their descendants.

A key paradox of *Klara and the Sun* is that the mechanised creation, Klara, gains her power from nature. Nourished by solar rays, she is invested with a degree of sensitivity that allows her to see complexity even if she doesn't always appreciate the nuances of what she observes.

**I believe I have my feelings. The more I observe, the more feelings become available to me**

she says as her cybernetic program pushes her to take matters into her own hands. Klara may not be able to use second person pronouns effectively but she can certainly spot the dangers of over-thinking. The genetic engineering or 'lifting' that killed Josie's sister, Sal, and imperils Josie herself, is the supreme example of the triumph of technology for which competitive parents are prepared to risk their children's future. It is deeply ironic that it is the robotic Klara who defies the Mother's attempts to reconstruct her as a simulacrum that could effectively replace her daughter after death.

Jane Eyre, in a work that savagely attacked many of the deep-held tenets of Victorian culture, also aligns herself with intuition and feeling. Time and again she comes into conflict with individuals who resemble automata rather than living beings. Mrs Reed is a neglectful, uncaring aunt, devoid of natural compassion. Mr Brocklehurst is a pillar of the community, whose cruelty is masked by religious doctrine that camouflages his own greed and self-righteousness. St John Rivers is an austere, passionless lover whose altruism is driven by principle rather than tenderness.

Like Klara, Jane is constantly faced with doors that are shut against her and private conversations from which she is excluded. For in social environments, she too is an alien.

**I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there ... a thing that could not**





Jane Eyre 2012 Real Cary Fukunaga Ugc Distribution / Collection Christopher  
Contributor: Collection Christopher / Alamy Stock Photo  
Contributor: Moviestore Collection Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo



sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities.

Not only is she objectified but she is frequently referred to as non-human, an impression with which she herself colludes. Gazing into the Red Room mirror, she can only see her reflection staring back,

a strange little figure there [...] with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear [...] I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp'.

Occupying a limbo zone, Jane and Klara are permanent puzzles to the other characters, who cannot slot them easily into any conventional category. At Thornfield,

Jane's equivocal position, neither gentry nor servant, makes her an enigma.

'Half of them are detestable, the rest ridiculous'

says Blanche Ingram about governesses, ignoring Jane's presence in the room and dehumanising her in the process. And Klara faces the question,

Are you a guest at all? Or do I treat you like a vacuum cleaner?

Yet it is through their indeterminate status that these narrators come to grasp the full implications of the horror story that is being played out under their eyes. Grace Poole's mysterious appearances, Melania Housekeeper's suspicion of Josie's 'portrait' are clues to sinister secrets, the sickness at the heart of these supposedly civilised societies. Wealthy households, apparently calm and ordered, are in fact nests of intrigue, suspicion and plotting that hide illness, lunacy and ultimate self-destruction. In the best tradition of the unreliable narrator, both books use the imperfect vision of robot and growing girl to critique a culture whose natural values have been reversed. They reflect the abiding anxieties of their age.

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# Drops

## The Dangerous Power of the Elliptical Message

Tim Clist examines the phenomenon of Qanon social media messaging, suggesting that it was the nature of the language used by the mysterious author that was so disturbingly attractive to such a large number of people.

On January 6th 2021 protesters stormed the US Capitol and tried to prevent the election results being certified. Some of the most striking images of the day feature a tattooed and shirtless man in a horned furry helmet carrying a megaphone and American flag. Later convicted for his part in the insurrection, the man was Jacob Chansley, aka Jake Angeli, discharged from the navy for refusing a vaccine, and also known as 'the Q shaman'. Other protesters wore hoodies with giant Qs on or held signs saying 'Q sent us'. These elements of the insurrection were a physical-world manifestation of an online conspiracy theory derived from around five thousand messages posted to the message boards 4-chan, 8-chan and 8-kun.

### An Unnamed Author

The author of these messages was 'Q', an individual claiming knowledge of dark secrets and possession of high-level military clearance. The posts developed into a kind of wish-fulfilment fantasy

for American right-wingers and the conspiracy-minded as they discussed (and collectively embellished) stories of bloodthirsty baby-eaters at the heart of power. Following Qanon eroded followers' trust in institutions and in conventional sources of information, leaving them suspicious of mainstream culture and alienated from conventional politics. Many believers also became estranged from family members, and stories of people trying to reason with mistrustful, radicalised relatives abounded on Reddit. Because the group didn't really care about evidence, nothing could be discounted and it became a stew of ideas that individuals could pick from according to preference. Elements included both ridiculous, almost childlike fantasies (Trump was going to unveil JFK Jr. – who died in a plane crash in 1999 – as his running mate for 2020; Trump's father took possession of Nikola Tesla's private papers and they contained the mysteries of the universe; Trump was a time traveller from the future...) and dark elements too (anti-semitic tropes; assuming school shootings

were faked; extreme libertarian ideas from armed anti-government militias).

One remarkable aspect of these developments is how far they were driven by raw text – Q was anonymous, so it wasn't personal charisma or celebrity driving things, and the posts only sometimes included images or links. With many Americans mistrusting mainstream media and consuming ideas via YouTube and Instagram, independent of traditional journalistic standards or gatekeeping, conditions were ripe for them to have an impact. But their style was itself significant in their spread and it's interesting to identify what made them so effective.

### Making the Reader Supply Meaning

Missing out a grammatically necessary part of a clause is called ellipsis, and Q drops are unusual in how much they leave out. When we encounter ellipsis we automatically fill in missing elements – if someone asks 'Where



'Years' or 'Marker' is just a noun phrase, so to make any sense of it a reader has to add their own verb.

## Semantic Ambiguity

Besides this grammatical underdetermination, drops are often also semantically ambiguous in a way that demands reader input. Drop 875827 has excellent examples of these two phenomena (ellipsis and semantic ambiguity) working in tandem, with multiple sentences consisting of a single abstract noun: 'Message', 'UNITY', 'AWAKENING'. Each necessitates interpretation, so readers must supply their own semantic content in the same way the ellipsis makes them provide their own grammatical content. The metaphor 'AWAKENING' especially can be interpreted in profoundly different ways; it could be a spiritual awakening – a Christian revival – or some sort of vaguely yoga-related personal enlightenment, or a new sense that militias should take to the streets and resist the government. A version of this drop stating its meaning explicitly would alienate people. Something like

**'THERE WILL BE A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING WITH MORE PEOPLE GOING TO CHURCH'**

would turn off militia men, but

**'A VIOLENT RISING AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IS COMING'**

would alienate wellness influencers. By no means are all the messages elusive (the start of drop 17734020 reads

**Endless lies. Endless wars. Endless inflation. Endless 'printing'. Endless oppression. Endless subjugation. Endless surveillance.**

which is a quite typical list of libertarian bugbears, even including 'printing' as a reference to quantitative easing, whereby governments create money in times of economic difficulty.) But the evocative ambiguity, and the way the messages' incompleteness calls on the reader's own assumptions, are characteristic of Q's style and integral to the drops' success.

Pronouns also help readers customise the texts as they read them - the openness of 'They' (who 'made [...] enslaved children famous' and 'will not be safe' in the streets in drop 875827) invites the reader to insert anyone they specially dislike into a fantasy of justice being served. Besides this, the first person plural pronouns mythologise and include the reader as part of the movement

are you going?' and you reply 'town', the listener processes it as something like 'I am going to town' even though those words are absent. This process usually depends on shared assumptions or knowledge from previous turns still being in participants' memory – if you started a conversation by saying 'town' to someone, it would be impossible for them to decide what you meant. Q drops are larded with ellipsis and it does fascinating work:

On first glance drops like this seem difficult to follow, with strings of acronyms and isolated nouns. Without context, the meaning is unclear and it's not obvious why this style would gain such a following. But even with the context, for readers who'd learned the stories and become familiar with American politics, they remain open to interpretation, unresolved. A crucial part of their success is the way they allow multiple readers to interpret them in their own way.



One of the odd things about Q believers as a whole was how diverse they were, with distinct separate constituencies including gun-owning men who discussed the possibility of a second civil war ('boogaloo boys'), very right-wing dominionist Christians and hippy-dippy Instagram wellness types. Those people would usually have little to do with one another, but the Q drops managed to keep them all on board, with the ellipsis playing a significant role. Ellipsis, by its nature, demands assumptions so that incomplete clauses can be understood, and readers generally, naturally, supply ideas they're familiar or comfortable with, or that, at the very least, fit their assumptions. A minor sentence like

- drop 139863 commands the reader not to 'glorify' 'us', implying that the group referred to are both modest and worth glorifying, a gritty and selfless crew doing unglamorous work against evil. Other drops flatter the reader even more directly with second-person in 'They will fight but you are ready' (7538264). Pronouns by their nature depend on the reader inferring what or who they denote, and in Q drops they allow readers to include themselves in a personalised fantasy cast of goodies and baddies.

## Baked Goods

Ambiguity and ellipsis were also productive in the way they fuelled an activity called 'baking' – in this metaphor, hints or morsels of information were known as 'crumbs' and building coherent theories around them was called 'baking', turning the crumbs into something more substantial. This was central to the conspiracy theory's growth, as the discussion generated a sense of community and feeling of progress. Speculation provided a fountain of new ideas but the nature of the messageboards also meant those ideas were immediately crowd-tested, with the most appealing being most discussed. One of the most common instructions to the Q-curious was 'do your own research', something which often seemed to comprise watching Youtube videos about conspiracies, but the whole secondary world of on-boarding explainers and even wilder, more baroque claims could only exist because the drops rejected explicit clarity.

Converts seemed more invested in the ideas for having to find material themselves (even if that only meant googling a new buzzword). 'Clean' in 875827 is a good example of the way the messages' ambiguity fuelled this – the ellipsis makes it impossible to tell what word class it is, with multiple quite different readings all plausible. It could be an imperative verb, Q telling the reader to 'Clean' (themselves, morally? Their devices, so as to not attract intelligence agency attention?); it could be an adjective, suggesting Bolton's actions will be 'clean'; it could be part of the verb phrase in a clause like 'What's coming will clean up American life'. And then 'Stage' in the next line is the same – it could be a noun (in something like 'The stage is set', or in a different sense in something like 'Here comes the next stage') or a verb ('Stage the coup'). Sometimes Q would also more

straightforwardly just use direct questions – drop 1769202 lists journalists and then asks 'Why did the Podesta Group close? Public charges? No? Why close?', directly suggesting a topic for investigation. In these ways the style of the drops is perfect to stimulate speculation – they suggest topics and individuals for posters to look into but also mostly resist the sort of explicit claims that would need some sort of evidence, and they avoid answering questions with straight answers that would eliminate the need for reader speculation.

## Creating the Implied Author

While it's strange that anyone took Q seriously (especially on message boards known for nihilistic trolling), there are features that try to represent the author as a military type – someone business-like, terse, transactional. Imperatives –

Find the loudest voices

### STAY TOGETHER

– suggest that the reader's actions matter; Q has authority and needs things done now. Some of the commands given are hilariously basic, as 'learn to archive offline' presumably means something like 'take screenshots' or 'learn to right-click and 'Save as'', but the formality of 'archive' represents it as practically spycraft. The ellipsis and initialisms also sound business-like, as if Q is too busy and important to waste words completing sentences, and the drops echo military jargon with initialisms and clippings

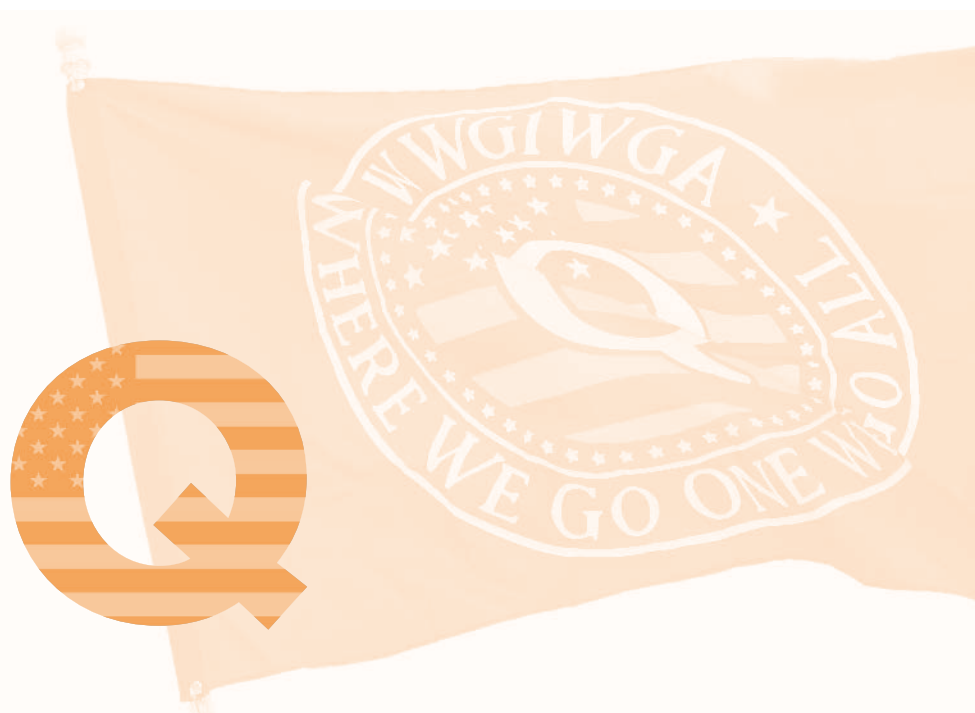
('NAT SEC' for national security, 'WH' for white house, 'HRC' for Hillary Clinton and 'NK' for North Korea). They flatter the reader by treating them as an insider who doesn't need everything spelled out.

Qanon was altogether a strange blend of message board culture and iconoclastic prophecy, promising a day of judgement close at hand, punishment and damnation to be visited on wrongdoers and traitors, lurid and ridiculous and very online all at once. Its end-times tone and goodies-versus-baddies dichotomy led some to insurrection and others to alienation from friends and relatives, choosing instead rabbit holes and 'research'. When those readers went to Q drops they found there, in a style where the cryptic and cosmic intertwined, just what they wanted to find.

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