arn what—in its style, structure, characterization, and exploration of eme—makes it interesting. As we do so, the story becomes even more teresting.

In this way, the analysis of literature is a special form of critical think-g. We are thinking critically about Chopin's story, and, furthermore, we 're thinking carefully and critically about our *own* thinking—about the ature of our response to the literary work. We focus on specific details id put into words our general responses. Then we test these responses ice again against the evidence of the text itself. The process continues, ntil we are satisfied that we have given the work a sensitive and full terpretation.

Of course part of our activity as critical thinkers is to ask ourselves: Is y interpretation of this story as perceptive and as full as I can make it? What have I taken account of? Is there anything that I may have overooked, or that I need to reconsider? Is there another way, another point f view, according to which this literary work might be examined and nderstood? (Chapters 6 and 7 will go into detail about "meaning" and nterpretation.")

Reading literature on our own gives pleasure and stimulates our inds. Then, when we study literature in the classroom or in a writing assignment, usually we find not that our pleasure diminishes, but, rather, hat it increases: We gain insight into how something that is well-made perates, how it is put together. Our appreciation of the work is deepned, and our thinking is made sharper, and more complex. For more bout critical thinking, see Chapter 3.

3

THE READER AS WRITER: DRAFTING AND WRITING

I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork.
—Peter de Vries

All there is to writing is having ideas. To learn to write is to learn to have ideas.
—Robert Frost

A writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.
—Thomas Mann

PRE-WRITING: GETTING IDEAS

How does one "learn to have ideas"? Among the methods are the following: reading with a pen or pencil in hand so that (as we have already seen) one can annotate the text; keeping a journal in which one jots down reflections about one's reading; and talking with others about the reading. Let's take another look at the first method, annotating.

Annotating a Text

In reading, if you own the book do not hesitate to mark it up, indicating (by highlighting or underlining, or by marginal notes) what puzzles you, what pleases or interests you, and what displeases or bores you. Later you'll want to think further about these responses, asking yourself if, on rereading, you still feel this way, and if not, why not, but these first responses will get you started.

Annotations of the sort given on pages 15–16, which chiefly call attention to contrasts, indicate that the student is thinking about writing ıe sort of analysis of the story, an essay in which the parts are examd to see how they relate to each other or in which a part is examined to how it relates to the whole.

ɔre about Getting Ideas: A Second Story Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour"

:'s look at a story that is a little longer than "Ripe Figs," and then we'll ɔuss how, in addition to annotating, one might get ideas for writing ıut it.

Kate Chopin

THE STORY OF AN HOUR

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences, veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "Free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending her in the blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face

of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being.

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in the very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his gripsack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

'ainstorming for Ideas for Writing

ılike annotating, which consists of making brief notes and small marks the printed page, *brainstorming*—the free jotting down of ideas—reires that you jot down whatever comes to mind, without inhibition. ın't worry about spelling, about writing complete sentences, or about ifying your thoughts; just let one thought lead to another.

Later, you will review your jottings, deleting some, connecting with ows others that are related, amplifying still others. For now, you want get going, and so there is no reason to look back. Thus, you might jot wn something about the title:

> Title speaks of an hour, and story covers an hour, but maybe takes five minutes to read.

And then, perhaps prompted by "an hour," you might happen to add something to this effect:

> Doubt that a woman who got news of the death of her husband could move from grief to joy within an hour.

Your next jotting might have little or nothing to do with this issue; it might simply say:

> Enjoyed "Hour" more than "Ripe Figs" partly because "Hour" is so shocking.

And then you might ask yourself:

> By shocking, do I mean "improbable," or what? Come to think of it, maybe it's not so improbable. A lot depends on what the marriage was like.

Focused Free Writing

Focused free writing, or directed free writing, is a related method that some writers use to uncover ideas they want to write about. Concentrating on one issue, such as a question that strikes them as worth puzzling over (What kind of person is Mrs. Mallard?), they write at length, nonstop, for perhaps five or ten minutes.

Writers who find free writing helpful put down everything that bears on the one issue or question they are examining. They do not stop at this stage to evaluate the results, and they do not worry about niceties of sentence structure or of spelling. They just explore ideas in a steady stream of writing, using whatever associations come to mind. If they pause in their writing, it is only to refer to the text, to search for more detail—perhaps a quotation—that will help them to answer their question.

After the free-writing session, these writers usually go back and reread what they have written, highlighting or underlining what seems to be of value. Of course, they find much that is of little or no use, but they also usually find that some strong ideas have surfaced and have received some development. At this point the writers are often able to make an outline and then begin a draft.

Here is an example of one student's focused free writing:

What do I know about Mrs. Mallard? Let me put everything down here I know about her or can figure out from what Kate Chopin tells me. When she finds herself alone after the death of her husband, she says, "Free. Body and soul free" and before that she said "free, free, free." Three times. So she has suddenly perceived that she has not been free; she has been under the influence of a "powerful will." In this case it has been her husband, but she says no one, man nor woman, should impose their will on anyone else. So it's not a feminist issue—it's a power issue. No one should push anyone else around is what I guess Chopin means, force someone to do what the other person wants. I used to have a friend that did that to me all the time; he had to run everything. They say that fathers—before the women's movement—used to run things, with the father in charge of all the decisions, so maybe this is an honest reaction to having been pushed around by a husband. I think Mrs. Mallard is a believable character, even if the plot is not all that believable—all those things happening in such quick succession.

.isting

n your preliminary thinking you may find it useful to make lists. In the revious chapter we saw that listing the traits of characters was helpful in hinking about Chopin's "Ripe Figs":

Maman-Nainaine

older than Babette

"stately way"

"patient as the statue of la Madone"

expects to be obeyed

connects actions with seasons

Babette

young

active

obedient

For "The Story of an Hour" you might list Mrs. Mallard's traits, or you might list the stages in her development. Such a list is not the same as a summary of the plot. The list helps the writer to see the sequence of psychological changes.

weeps (when she gets the news)

goes to room, alone

"pressed down by a physical exhaustion"

"dull stare"

"something coming to her"

strives to beat back "this thing"

"Free, free, free!" The "vacant stare went from her eyes"

"A clear and exalted perception"

Rejects Josephine

"She was drinking in the very elixir of life"

Gets up, opens door, "A feverish triumph in her eyes"

Sees B, and dies

Unlike brainstorming and annotating, which let you go in all directions, listing requires that you first make a decision about what you will be listing—traits of character, images, puns, or whatever. Once you make the decision you can then construct the list, and, with a list in front of you, you will probably see patterns that you were not fully conscious of earlier.

Some students prefer to approach listing a bit differently. They like to list everything that occurs to them, almost as if they were doing a

free-writing exercise. Then, once they have a list, they separate the items on it, clustering them into smaller, more specific groups. Which items, for example, concern or refer to Mrs. Mallard's thoughts? Her feelings? Her appearance? Her relationship to other people?

A list is a handy organizational device; and by working with it, you can begin to see how your comments and questions, and the details you have noted in the text, fit together. By constructing a list, and using it as a tool for thinking, you can start to sense the shape of the paper as a whole.

Asking Questions

If you feel stuck, ask yourself questions. If you are thinking about a work of fiction, ask yourself questions about the plot and the characters: Are they believable? Are they interesting? What does it all add up to? What does the story mean to *you*? (The chapters in this book on fiction, drama, and poetry include questions on each form.) One student found it helpful to jot down the following questions:

Plot

Ending false? Unconvincing? Or prepared for?

Character

Mrs. M. unfeeling? Immoral?

Mrs. M. unbelievable character?

What might her marriage have been like? Many gaps.

(Can we tell what her husband was like?)

"And yet she loved him—sometimes." Fickle? Realistic?

What is "this thing that was approaching to possess her"?

Symbolism

Set on spring day = symbolic of new life?

You don't have to be as tidy as this student. You may begin by jotting down notes and queries about what you like or dislike and about what puzzles or amuses you. What follows are the jottings of another student, Janet Vong. They are, obviously, in no particular order—the student is

brainstorming, putting down whatever occurs to her—though it is equally obvious that one note sometimes led to the next:

Title nothing special. What might be a better title?

Could a woman who loved her husband be so heartless?

Is she heartless? Did she love him?

What are (were) Louise's feelings about her husband?

Did she want too much? What did she want?

Could this story happen today? Feminist interpretation?

Sister (Josephine)—a busybody?

Tricky ending—but maybe it could be true

"And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not." Why does one love someone "sometimes"?

Irony: plot has reversal. Are characters ironic too?

These jottings will help the reader-writer think about the story, find a special point of interest, and develop a thoughtful argument about it.

Keeping a Journal

A journal is not a diary, a record of what the writer did during the day ("Today I read Chopin's 'Hour'"). Rather, a journal is a place to store some of the thoughts you may have inscribed on a scrap of paper or in the margin of the text, such as your initial response to the title of a work or to the ending. It is also a place to jot down further reflections, such as thoughts about what the work means to you, and what was said in the classroom about writing in general or specific works.

You will get something out of your journal if you write an entry at least once a week, but you will get much more if you write entries after reading each assignment and after each class meeting. You may want to reflect on why your opinion is so different from that of another student, or you may want to apply a concept such as "character" or "irony" or "plausibility" to a story that later you may write about in an essay. Comparisons are especially helpful: How does this work (or this character, or this rhyme scheme) differ from last week's reading?

You might even make an entry in the form of a letter to the author or from one character to another. You might write a dialogue between characters in two works or between two authors, or you might record an experience of your own that is comparable to something in the work.

A student who wrote about "The Story of an Hour" began with the following entry in his journal. In reading this entry, notice that one idea stimulates another. The student was, quite rightly, concerned with getting and exploring ideas, not with writing a unified paragraph.

> Apparently a "well-made" story, but seems clever rather than moving or real. Doesn't seem plausible. Mrs. M's change comes out of the blue—maybe some women might respond like this, but probably not most.
>
> Does literature deal with unusual people, or with usual (typical?) people? Shouldn't it deal with typical? Maybe not. (Anyway, how can I know?) Is "typical" same as "plausible"? Come to think of it, prob. not.
>
> Anyway, whether Mrs. M is typical or not, is her change plausible, believable? Think more about this.
>
> Why did she change? Her husband dominated her life and controlled her actions; he did "impose a private will upon a fellow creature." She calls this a crime, even if well-intentioned. Is it a crime?

CRITICAL THINKING: ARGUING WITH YOURSELF

In our discussion of annotating, brainstorming, free writing, listing, asking questions, and writing entries in a journal, the emphasis has been on responding freely rather than in any highly systematic or disciplined way. Something strikes us (perhaps an idea, perhaps an uncertainty), and we jot it down. Maybe even before we finish jotting it down we go on to question it, but probably not; at this early stage it is enough to put onto paper some thoughts, rooted in our first responses, and to keep going.

The almost random play of mind that is evident in brainstorming and in the other activities already discussed is of course a kind of thinking, but the term **critical thinking** (which we addressed briefly in Chapter 2) is reserved for something different. When we think critically, we skeptically scrutinize our own ideas—for example, by searching out our underlying assumptions, or by evaluating what we have quickly jotted down as evidence. We have already seen some examples of this sort of analysis of one's own thinking in the journal entries, where, for instance, a student wrote that literature should probably deal with "typical" people, then wondered if "typical" and "plausible" were the same, and then added "probably not."

Speaking broadly, critical thinking is rational, logical thinking. In thinking critically,

- one scrutinizes one's assumptions;
- one tests the evidence one has collected, even to the extent of looking for counterevidence; and
- one revises one's thesis when necessary, in order to make the argument as complete and convincing as possible.

Let's start with assumptions. If I say that a story is weak because it is improbable, I ought to think about my assumption that improbability is a fault. I can begin by asking myself if all good stories—or all the stories that I value highly—are probable. I may recall that among my favorites is *Alice in Wonderland* (or *Gulliver's Travels* or *Animal Farm*)—so I probably have to withdraw my assumption that improbability in itself makes a story less than good. I may go on to refine the idea and decide that improbability is not a fault in satiric stories but is a fault in other kinds, but that is not the same as saying bluntly that improbability is a fault.

The second aspect of critical thinking that we have isolated—searching for counterevidence within the literary work—especially involves rereading the work to see if we have overlooked material or have taken a particular detail out of context. If, for instance, we say that in "The Story of an Hour" Josephine is a busybody, we should reexamine the work to make sure that she indeed is meddling needlessly and is not offering welcome or necessary assistance. Perhaps the original observation will stand up, but perhaps on rereading the story we may come to feel, as we examine each of Josephine's actions, that she cannot reasonably be characterized as a busybody.

Different readers may come to different conclusions; the important thing is that all readers should subject their initial responses to critical thinking, testing their responses against all of the evidence. Remember,

your instructor probably expects you to hand in an essay that is essentially an **argument,** a paper that advances a thesis of your own, and therefore you will revise your drafts if you find counterevidence. The **thesis** might be that

- the story is improbable,
- the story is typical of Chopin,
- the story is anti-woman,
- the story is a remarkable anticipation of contemporary feminist thinking.

Whatever your thesis, it should be able to withstand scrutiny. You may not convince every reader that you are unquestionably right, but you should make every reader feel that your argument is thoughtful. If you read your notes and then your drafts critically, you probably will write a paper that meets this standard.

One last point, or maybe it's two. Just as your first jottings probably won't be the products of critical thinking, your first reading of the literary work probably *won't* be a critical reading. It is entirely appropriate to begin by reading simply for enjoyment. After all, the reason we read literature (or listen to music, or go to an art museum, or watch dancers) is to derive pleasure. It happens, however, that in this course you are trying (among other things) to deepen your understanding of literature, and therefore you are *studying* literature. On subsequent readings, therefore, you will read the work critically, taking careful note of the writer's view of human nature and the writer's ways of achieving certain effects.

This business of critical thinking is important, and we will discuss it yet again, on pages 102–103, in talking about interpretations of literature.

Arriving at a Thesis and Arguing It

If you think critically about your early jottings and about the literary work itself, you may find that some of your jottings lead to dead ends, but some will lead to further ideas that hold up under scrutiny. What the thesis of the essay will be—the idea that will be asserted and argued (supported with evidence)—is still in doubt, but there is no doubt about one thing: A good essay will have a thesis, a point, an argument. You ought to be able to state your point in a **thesis sentence.**

Consider these candidates as possible thesis sentences:

1. Mrs. Mallard dies soon after hearing that her husband has died.

True, but scarcely a point that can be argued or even developed. About the most the essayist can do with this sentence is amplify it by summarizing the plot of the story, a task not worth doing unless the plot is unusually obscure. An essay may include a sentence or two of summary to give readers their bearings, but a summary is not an essay.

2. The story is a libel on women.

In contrast to the first statement, this one can be developed into an argument. Probably the writer will try to demonstrate that Mrs. Mallard's behavior is despicable. Whether this point can be convincingly argued is another matter; the thesis may be untenable, but it is a thesis. A second problem, however, is this: Even if the writer demonstrates that Mrs. Mallard's behavior is despicable, he or she will have to go on to demonstrate that the presentation of one despicable woman constitutes a libel on women in general. That's a pretty big order.

3. The story is clever but superficial because it is based on an unreal character.

Here, too, is a thesis, a point of view that can be argued. Whether this thesis is true is another matter. The writer's job will be to support it by presenting evidence. Probably the writer will have no difficulty in finding evidence that the story is "clever"; the difficulty will be in establishing a case that the characterization of Mrs. Mallard is "unreal." The writer will have to set forth some ideas about what makes a character real and then will have to show that Mrs. Mallard is an "unreal" (unbelievable) figure.

4. The irony of the ending is believable partly because it is consistent with earlier ironies in the story.

It happens that the student who wrote the essay printed on page 44 began by drafting an essay based on the third of these thesis topics, but as she worked on a draft she found that she could not support her assertion that the character was unconvincing. In fact, she came to believe that although Mrs. Mallard's joy was the reverse of what a reader might expect, several early reversals in the story helped make Mrs. Mallard's shift from grief to joy acceptable.

Remember: It's not likely that you will quickly find a thesis. Annotating, making entries in a journal, and writing a first draft are ways of finding a thesis.

WRITING A DRAFT

After jotting down notes, and further notes stimulated by rereading and further thinking, you probably will be able to formulate a tentative thesis. At this point most writers find it useful to glance over their preliminary notes and to jot down the thesis and a few especially promising notes—brief statements of what they think their key points may be, such as key quotations that may help support the thesis.

Here are the selected notes (not the original brainstorming notes, but a later selection from them, with additions) and a draft that makes use of them:

title? Ironies in an Hour (?) An Hour of Irony (?) Kate Chopin's Irony (?)

thesis: irony at end is prepared for by earlier ironies

chief irony: Mrs. M. dies just as she is beginning to enjoy life

smaller ironies:

1. "sad message" brings her joy
2. Richards is "too late" at end;
3. Richards is too early at start

These notes are in effect a very brief **outline.** Some writers at this point move to develop a fuller outline, but probably most writers begin with only a brief outline, knowing that in the process of developing a draft from these few notes additional ideas will arise. For these writers, the time to set down a detailed outline is *after* they have written a first or second draft. The outline of the written draft will, as we shall see, help them to make sure that their draft has an adequate organization, and that main points are developed.

Sample Draft: "Ironies in an Hour"

Now for the student's draft—not the first version, but a revised draft with some of the irrelevancies of the first draft omitted and some evidence added.

The digits within the parentheses refer to the page numbers from which the quotations are drawn, though with so short a work as "The Story of an Hour," page references are hardly necessary. (Here the references are *not* to the book you are now reading, but to the anthology that

the student used.) Check with your instructor to find out if you must always give citations. (Detailed information about how to document a paper is given on pages 307–322.)

Ironies in an Hour

After we know how the story turns out, if we reread it we find irony at the very start, as is true of many other stories. Mrs. Mallard's friends assume, mistakenly, that Mrs. Mallard is deeply in love with her husband, Brently Mallard. They take great care to tell her gently of his death. The friends mean well, and in fact they do well. They bring her an hour of life, an hour of freedom. They think their news is sad. Mrs. Mallard at first expresses grief when she hears the news, but soon she finds joy in it. So Richards's "sad message" (26), though sad in Richards's eyes, is in fact a happy message.

Among the ironic details is the statement that when Mallard entered the house, Richards tried to conceal him from Mrs. Mallard, but "Richards was too late" (28). This is ironic because earlier Richards "hastened" (21) to bring his sad message; if he had at the start been "too late" (28), Brently Mallard would have arrived at home first, and Mrs. Mallard's life would not have ended an hour later but would simply have gone on as it had been. Yet another irony at the end of the story is the diagnosis of the doctors. The doctors say she died of "heart disease—of joy that kills" (28). In one sense the doctors are right: Mrs. Mallard has experienced a great joy. But of course the doctors totally misunderstand the joy that kills her.

The central irony resides not in the well-intentioned but ironic actions of Richards, or in the unconsciously ironic words of the

doctors, but in her own life. In a way she has been dead. She "sometimes" (27) loved her husband, but in a way she has been dead. Now, his apparent death brings her new life. This new life comes to her at the season of the year when "the tops of trees . . . were all aquiver with the new spring life" (26). But, ironically, her new life will last only an hour. She looks forward to "summer days" (27) but she will not see even the end of this spring day. Her years of marriage were ironic. They brought her a sort of living death instead of joy. Her new life is ironic too. It grows out of her moment of grief for her supposedly dead husband, and her vision of a new life is cut short.

[New page]

Work Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour. An Introduction to Literature. 12th ed. Ed. Sylvan Barnet et al. New York: Longman, 2001. 26–28.

Revising a Draft

The draft, though excellent, is not yet a finished essay. The student went on to improve it in many small but important ways.

First, the draft needs a good opening that will let the **audience**—the readers—know where the writer will be taking them. (Pages 286–288 discuss introductory paragraphs.) Doubtless you know, from your own experience as a reader, that readers can follow an argument more easily and with more pleasure if early in the discussion the writer alerts them to the basic argument. (The title, too, can strongly suggest the thesis.) Second, some of the paragraphs could be clearer.

In revising paragraphs—or, for that matter, in revising an entire draft—writers unify, organize, clarify, and polish. Writers are assisted in revising if they imagine that they are readers. They try to put themselves into the mind of the imagined audience, asking themselves, "Is this clear?" "Will a reader need another example?" Or, on the other hand, "Will a reader feel that I am talking down, giving more examples than are needed?"

1. **Unity** is achieved partly by eliminating irrelevancies. Notice that in the final version, printed on page 44, the writer has deleted "as is true of many other stories."
2. **Organization** is a matter of arranging material into a sequence that will help the reader grasp the point.
3. **Clarity** is achieved by providing concrete details and quotations to support generalizations and by providing helpful transitions ("for instance," "furthermore," "on the other hand," "however").
4. **Polish** is small-scale revision. For instance, one deletes unnecessary repetitions. (In the second paragraph of the draft the phrase "the doctors" appears three times, but it appears only once in the final version of the paragraph.) Similarly, in polishing, a writer combines choppy sentences into longer sentences and breaks overly long sentences into shorter sentences.

Later, after producing a draft that seems close to a finished essay, writers engage in yet another activity. They edit.

5. **Editing** is concerned with such matters as checking the accuracy of quotations by comparing them with the original, checking a dictionary for the spelling of doubtful words, and checking a handbook for doubtful punctuation—for instance, whether a comma or a semicolon is needed in a particular sentence.

✔ A Checklist for Revising for Clarity

- ❑ Is word choice precise and specific? While writing the draft, did you feel that a particular word was close to what you meant, but not quite right/ If so, replace that word with the *right* word.
- ❑ Do you offer concrete examples where necessary?
- ❑ Are technical terms used appropriately and helpfully? Can any jargon be replaced with plain English?
- ❑ Does your prose include any dead or mixed metaphors, or clichés?
- ❑ Have you put together what belongs together? Do modifiers appear close to, and refer clearly to, the words they modify?

- ❑ Have you eliminated sexist language? Have you replaced such words as "mankind" and "poetess" with gender-neutral terms, and eliminated the generic "he," "him," and "his"? (Usually you can change such an expression as "The novelist . . . he" to "Novelists . . . they.")
- ❑ Have you replaced passive verbs with active verbs where appropriate?
- ❑ Do pronouns have clear references, and do they agree in number with the nouns to which they refer?
- ❑ Does the structure of your sentence reflect the structure of your thought? Are parallel ideas in parallel constructions?

Two Ways of Outlining a Draft

Whether or not you draw up an outline as a preliminary guide to writing a draft, you will be able to improve your draft if you prepare an outline of what you have written. If you write on a word processor it is probably especially important that you make an outline of your written draft. Writing on a word processor is—or seems—so easy, so effortless, that we can all too easily fill screen after screen with loosely structured material.

1. Outline what each paragraph says. For each paragraph in your draft, jot down the topic sentence or topic idea, and under each of these sentences, indented, jot down key words for the idea(s) developed in the paragraph. Thus, in an outline of the draft we have just looked at, for the first two paragraphs the writer might make these jottings:

story ironic from start

friends think news is sad

Ms. M. finds joy

some ironic details

Richards hastened, but "too late"

doctors right and also wrong

An outline of what you have written will help you to see if your draft is adequate in three important ways. The outline will show you

1. the sequence of major topics,
2. the degree of development of these topics, and
3. the argument, the thesis.

By studying your outline you may see that your first major point (probably after an introductory paragraph) would be more effective as your third point, and that your second point needs to be developed further. An outline of this sort, perhaps even using some phrases from the draft, is essentially a brief version of your draft.

2. Outline what each paragraph does. Consider making yet another sort of outline, an outline indicating not what each paragraph says but what each paragraph *does*. A first attempt at such an outline of the three-paragraph draft of the essay on "The Story of an Hour" might look something like this:

1. Action of the friends is ironic
2. Gives some specific (minor) details about ironies
3. Explains "central irony"

One ought to see something wrong here. The jotting for the first paragraph does *not* tell us what the paragraph *does;* rather, it more or less summarizes the content of the paragraph. It does not clearly introduce the thesis, or define a crucial term, or set the story in the context of Chopin's other work. An outline indicating the function of each paragraph will force you to see if your essay has an effective structure. We will see that the student later wrote a new opening paragraph for the essay on "The Story of an Hour."

✍ A RULE FOR WRITERS:

You may or may not want to sketch a rough outline before drafting your essay, but you certainly should outline what you hope is your final draft, to see (a) if it is organized, and (b) if the organization will be evident to the reader. (If you imagine a classmate as the reader, you may find that you need to add transitions, clarify definitions, and provide additional supporting evidence.)

✔ A Checklist for Reviewing a Revised Draft

- ❑ Does the draft fulfill the specifications (e.g., length, scope) of the assignment?
- ❑ Does the draft have a point, a focus?
- ❑ Is the title interesting and informative? Does it create a favorable first impression?

- ❑ Are the early paragraphs engaging, and do they give the reader a fairly good idea of what the thesis is, and how the paper will be organized?
- ❑ Are arguable assertions supported with adequate evidence?
- ❑ Do you keep your readers in mind, for instance, by defining terms that they may be unfamiliar with?
- ❑ If any quotations are included, are they adequately introduced with signal phrases (for instance, "One critic argues"), rather than just dumped into the essay? Are quotations as brief as possible? Might summaries (properly credited to the sources) be more effective than long quotations?
- ❑ Are quotations adequately commented on, not simply left to speak for themselves?
- ❑ Are *all* sources cited—not only words, but also ideas—including Internet material?
- ❑ Is the organization clear, reasonable, and effective? (Check by making a brief outline. Remember not only that the paper must be organized, but also that the organization must be clear to the reader. Check to see that transitions are adequate.)
- ❑ Does the final paragraph nicely round off the paper, or does it merely restate—unnecessarily—what is by now obvious?
- ❑ Is the documentation in correct form?

Peer Review

Your instructor may encourage (or even require) you to discuss your draft with another student or with a small group of students; that is, you may be asked to get a review from your peers. Such a procedure is helpful in several ways. First, it gives the writer a real audience, readers who can point to what pleases or puzzles them, who make suggestions, who may disagree (with the writer or with each other), and who frequently, though not intentionally, *misread*.

While it's true that writers don't necessarily like everything they hear they seldom hear "This is perfect. Don't change a word!"), reading and discussing their work with others almost always gives them a fresh perspective on their work, and a fresh perspective may stimulate thoughtful revision. (Having your intentions *misread* because your writing isn't clear enough can be particularly stimulating.)

The writer whose work is being reviewed is not the sole beneficiary. When students regularly serve as readers for each other, they become

better readers of their own work and consequently better revisers. As was said in Chapter 2, learning to write is in large measure learning to read.

If peer review is a part of the writing process in your course, the instructor may distribute a sheet with some suggestions and questions. An example of such a sheet follows.

QUESTIONS FOR PEER REVIEW ENGLISH 125a

Read each draft once, quickly. Then read it again, with the following questions in mind.

1. What is the essay's topic? Is it one of the assigned topics, or a variation from it? Does the draft show promise of fulfilling the assignment?
2. Looking at the essay as a whole, what thesis (main idea) is stated or implied? If implied, try to state it in your own words.
3. Is the thesis reasonable? How might it be strengthened?
4. Looking at each paragraph separately:
   a. What is the basic point? (If it isn't clear to you, ask for clarification.)
   b. How does the paragraph relate to the essay's main idea or to the previous paragraph?
   c. Should some paragraphs be deleted? Be divided into two or more paragraphs? Be combined? Be put elsewhere? (If you outline the essay by jotting down the gist of each paragraph, you will get help in answering these questions.)
   d. Is each sentence clearly related to the sentence that precedes and to the sentence that follows?
   e. Is each paragraph adequately developed?

f. Are there sufficient details, perhaps brief supporting quotations from the text?

5. What are the paper's chief strengths?

6. Make at least two specific suggestions that you think will assist the author to improve the paper.

THE FINAL VERSION

Here is the final version of the student's essay. The essay that was submitted to the instructor was typed, but here, so that you can easily see how the draft has been revised, we print the draft with the final changes written in by hand.

Ironies of Life in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"

~~Ironies in an Hour~~

Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"–which takes only a few minutes to read–turns out to have an ironic ending. On rereading it, however, one sees that the irony is not concentrated only in the outcome of the plot–Mrs. Mallard dies just when she is beginning to live–but is also present in many details.

After we know how the story turns out, if we reread it we find irony at the very start. ~~as is true of many other stories~~. Because Mrs. Mallard's friends and her sister assume, mistakenly, that ~~Mrs. Mallard~~ she is deeply in love with her husband, Brently Mallard. They take great care to tell her gently of his death. ~~The friends~~ They mean well, and in fact they do well/ ~~They~~ bringing her an hour of life, an hour of joyous freedom. but it is ironic that They think their news is sad.

True, Mrs. Mallard at first expresses grief when she hears the news, but (unknown to her friends) soon she finds joy in it. So Richards's "sad message" (26), though sad in Richards's eyes, is in fact a happy message.

Among the small but significant ironic details near the end of the story is the statement that when Mallard entered the house, Richards tried to conceal him from Mrs. Mallard, but "Richards was too late" (28). This is ironic because almost at the start of the story, in the second paragraph, ~~earlier~~ Richards "hastened" (26) to bring his sad message; if he had at the start been "too late" (28), Brently Mallard would have arrived at home first, and Mrs. Mallard's life would not have ended an hour later but would simply have gone on as it has been. Yet another irony at the end of the story is the diagnosis of the doctors. ~~The doctors~~ They say she died of "heart disease–of joy that kills" (28). In one sense ~~the doctors~~ they are right: Mrs. Mallard has for the last hour experienced a great joy. But of course the doctors totally misunderstand the joy that kills her. It is not joy at seeing her husband alive, but her realization that the great joy she experienced during the last hour is over.

All of these ironic details add richness to the story, but the central irony resides not in the well-intentioned but ironic actions of Richards, or in the unconsciously ironic words of the doctors, but in ~~her~~ Mrs. Mallard's own life. ~~In a way she has been dead~~. She "sometimes" (27) loved her husband, but in a way she has been dead, a body subjected to her husband's will. Now, his apparent death brings her new life. Appropriately, this new life comes to her at the season of the year when "the tops of trees . . . were all aquiver with the new spring life" (26). But, ironically, her new life will last only an hour. She looks forward to "summer days" (27) but she will not see even the end of this spring day. She is free, free, free–but only until her husband walks through the doorway. If Her years of marriage were ironic, bringing ~~They brought~~ her a sort of living death instead of joy/ Her new life is ironic too/ It grows out of not only because

but also because her vision of "a long progression of years"
her moment of grief for her supposedly dead husband, ~~and her vision~~
within an hour on a spring day.
~~of a new life~~ is cut short/

New page]

Work Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." An Introduction to Literature.
12th ed. Ed. Sylvan Barnet et al. New York: Longman, 2001. 26-28.

A Brief Overview of the Final Version

Finally, as a quick review, let us look at several principles illustrated by this essay.

- The **title of the essay** is not merely the title of the work discussed; rather, it gives the reader a clue, a small idea of the essayist's topic. Because your title will create a crucial first impression, make sure that it is interesting.
- The **opening or introductory paragraph** does not begin by saying "In this story. . . ." Rather, by naming the author and the title it lets the reader know exactly what story is being discussed. It also develops the writer's thesis a bit so that readers know where they will be going.
- The **organization** is effective. The smaller ironies are discussed in the second and third paragraphs, the central (chief) irony in the last paragraph; that is, the essay does not dwindle or become anticlimactic—rather, it builds up. (Again, if you outline your draft you will see if it has an effective organization.)
- Some **brief quotations** are used, both to provide evidence and to let the reader hear Kate Chopin's writing.
- The essay is chiefly **devoted to analysis, not to summary.** The writer, properly assuming that the reader has read the work, does not tell the plot in great detail. But, aware that the reader has not memorized the story, the writer gives helpful reminders.

- The **present tense** customarily is used in narrating the action: "Mrs. Mallard dies"; "Mrs. Mallard's friends and relatives all assume."
- Although a **concluding paragraph** is often useful, it is not essential in a short analysis. In this essay, the last sentence explains the chief irony and, therefore, makes an acceptable ending.
- **Documentation** is given according to the form set forth in Chapter 15.
- There are no typographical errors. The author has **proofread** the paper carefully.

QUICK REVIEW

From First Response to Final Version: Writing an Essay about a Literary Work

- Read the text, then reread it, circling or underlining key words and jotting down questions and comments in the margins.
- If a specific topic has been assigned, reread the text with an eye toward finding evidence relevant to the topic.
- If you are to develop your own topic, follow your interests—for instance, about a particular character or theme.
- Develop your thoughts through free writing and note taking.
- Organize your thoughts—the computer can help you with this—by connecting related points, ideas, and questions.
- Refer to the text for quotations to use as evidence.
- Prepare a tentative outline.
- Write your first draft, focusing on presenting your thesis effectively.
- Review the literary work to make sure it fully supports your thesis. Quote from it—but use quotations as evidence, not as padding.
- Reread and revise the draft for content.
- Polish the draft for style.
- Check all quotations for accuracy, and check your spelling and punctuation.

4

TWO FORMS OF CRITICISM: EXPLICATION AND ANALYSIS

The last verse is not yet sufficiently explicated.

—John Dryden

Everything is what it is and not another thing.

—Bishop Joseph Butler

Unexplained beauty arouses an irritation in me, a sense that this would be a good place to scratch.

—William Empson

EXPLICATION

A line-by-line or episode-by-episode commentary on what is going on in a text is an **explication** (literally, unfolding or spreading out). An explication does not deal with the writer's life or times, and it is not a paraphrase, a rewording—although it may include paraphrase. An explication is a commentary revealing your sense of the meaning of the work. To this end it calls attention, as it proceeds, to the implications of words, the function of rhymes, the shifts in point of view, the development of contrasts, and any other contributions to the meaning.

A Sample Explication: Langston Hughes's "Harlem"

The following short poem is by Langston Hughes (1902–67), an African-American writer who was born in Joplin, Missouri; lived part of his youth in

Mexico; spent a year at Columbia University; served as a merchant seaman; and worked in a Paris nightclub. Later, when he returned to the United States, he showed some of his poems to Alain Locke, an influential critic, educator, and advocate of African-American literature. Hughes went on to publish fiction, plays, essays, and biographies; he also founded theaters, gave public readings, and was, in short, an important force.

HARLEM

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Different readers will respond at least somewhat differently to any work. On the other hand, because writers want to communicate, they try to control their readers' responses, and they count on their readers to understand the denotations of words as they understand them. Hughes assumed that his readers knew that Harlem was the site of a large African-American community in New York City. Explication is based on the assumption that the poem contains a meaning and that by studying the work thoughtfully we can unfold the meaning or meanings.

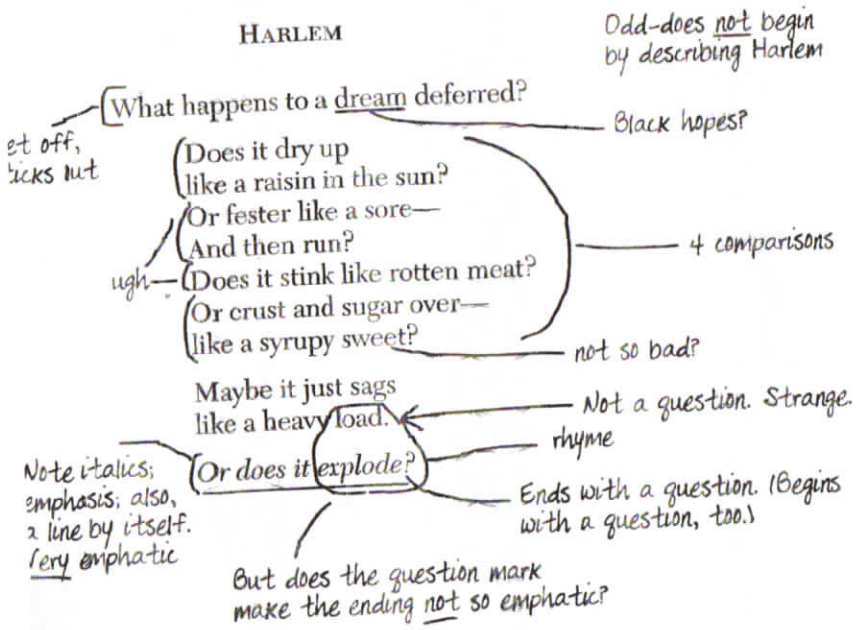
Let us assume that the reader understands Hughes is talking about Harlem, New York, and that the "dream deferred" refers to the unfulfilled hopes of African-Americans who live in a dominant white society. But Hughes does not say "hopes," he says "dream," and he does not say "unfulfilled," he says "deferred." You might ask yourself exactly what differences there are between these words. Next, after you have read the poem several times, you might think about which expression is better in the context, "unfulfilled hopes" or "dream deferred," and why.

Working toward an Explication of "Harlem"

In preparing to write an explication,

- Write on a computer, or type, or hand-write the complete text of the work—usually a poem but sometimes a short passage of prose—that you will explicate. The act of typing or writing it will help you to get into the piece, word by word, comma by comma.
- Type or write it *double-spaced*, so that you will have plenty of room for annotations as you study the piece.
- Make a few copies (or print a few copies, if you are using a word processor) before you start annotating, so that if one page gets too cluttered you can continue working on a clean copy. Or you may want to use one copy for certain kinds of annotations—let's say those concerning imagery—and other copies for other kinds of notes—let's say those concerning meter, or wordplay.
- If you are writing on a word processor, you can highlight words, boldface them, put them in capitals (for instance, to indicate accented syllables), and so forth.

Let's turn to an explication of the poem, a detailed examination of the whole. Here are the preliminary jottings.



These annotations get at the structure of the poem, the relationship of the parts. The student notices that the poem begins with a line set off by itself and ends with a line set off by itself, and he also notices that each of these lines is a question. Further, he indicates that each of these two lines is emphasized in other ways: The first begins farther to the left than any of the other lines—as though the other lines are subheadings or are in some way subordinate—and the last is italicized.

Some Journal Entries

Tim Clark, the student who made these annotations, later wrote an entry in his journal:

> Feb. 18. Since the title is "Harlem," it's obvious that the "dream" is by African-American people. Also, obvious that Hughes thinks that if the "dream" doesn't become real there may be riots ("explode"). I like "raisin in the sun" (maybe because I like the play), and I like the business about "a syrupy sweet"—much more pleasant than the festering sore and the rotten meat. But if the dream becomes "sweet," what's wrong with that? Why should something "sweet" explode?
>
> Feb. 21. Prof. McCabe said to think of structure or form of a poem as a sort of architecture, a building with a foundation, floors, etc., topped by a roof—but since we read a poem from top to bottom, it's like a building upside down. Title is foundation (even though it's at top); last line is roof, capping the whole. As you read, you add layers. Foundation of "Harlem" is a question (first line). Then, set back a bit from foundation, or built on it by white space, a tall room (7 lines high, with 4 questions); then, on top of this room, another room (2 lines, one statement, not a question). Funny, I thought that in poems all stanzas are the same number of lines. Then—more white space, so another unit—the roof. Man, this roof is going to fall in—"explodes." Not just the roof, maybe the whole house.

Feb. 21, pm. I get it; one line at start, one line at end; both are questions, but the last sort of says (because it is in italics) that it is the most likely answer to the question of the first line. The last line is also a question, but it's still an answer. The big stanza (7 lines) has 4 questions: 2 lines, 2 lines, 1 line, 2 lines. Maybe the switch to 1 line is to give some variety, so as not to be dull? It's exactly in the middle of the poem. I get the progress from raisin in the sun (dried, but not so terrible), to festering sore and to stinking meat, but I still don't see what's so bad about "a syrupy sweet." Is Hughes saying that after things are very bad they will get better? But why, then, the explosion at the end?

Feb 23. "Heavy load" and "sags" in next-to-last stanza seem to me to suggest slaves with bales of cotton, or maybe poor cotton pickers dragging big sacks of cotton. Or maybe people doing heavy labor in Harlem. Anyway, very tired. Different from running sore and stinking meat earlier; not disgusting, but pressing down, deadening. Maybe worse than a sore or rotten meat—a hard, hopeless life. And then the last line. Just one line, no fancy (and disgusting) simile. Boom! Not just pressed down and tired, like maybe some racist whites think (hope?) blacks will be? Bang! Will there be survivors?

Drawing on these notes, Tim Clark jotted down some key ideas to guide him through a draft of an explication of the poem. The organization of the draft posed no problem; for this explication, Clark simply followed the organization of the poem.

11 lines; short, but powerful; explosive
Question (first line)
Answers (set off by space and also indented)
"raisin in the sun": shrinking
"sore"
"rotten meat"
} disgusting

"syrupy sweet": relief from disgusting comparisons
final question (last line): explosion?
explosive (powerful) because:
short, condensed, packed
in italics
stands by self-like first line
no fancy comparison; very direct
metaphor, not simile

The Final Draft

Here is Tim Clark's final essay:

Langston Hughes's "Harlem"

"Harlem" is a poem that is only 11 lines long, but it is charged with power. It explodes. Hughes sets the stage, so to speak, by telling us in the title that he is talking about Harlem, and then he begins by asking, "What happens to a dream deferred?" The rest of the poem is set off by being indented, as though it is the answer to his question. This answer is in three parts (three stanzas, of different lengths).

In a way, it's wrong to speak of the answer, since the rest of the poem consists of questions, but I think Hughes means that each question (for instance, does a "deferred" hope "dry up / like a raisin in the sun?") really is an answer, something that really has happened and that will happen again. The first question, "Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?" is a famous line. To compare hope to a raisin dried in the sun is to suggest a terrible shrinking. The next two comparisons are to a "sore" and to "rotten meat." These comparisons are less clever, but they are very effective because they are disgusting. Then, maybe because of the disgusting comparisons, he gives a comparison that is not at all disgusting. In this comparison he says that maybe the "dream deferred" will "crust over— / like a syrupy sweet."

The seven lines with four comparisons are followed by a stanza of two lines with just one comparison:

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

So if we thought that this postponed dream might finally turn into something "sweet," we were kidding ourselves. Hughes comes down to earth, in a short stanza, with an image of a heavy load, which probably also calls to mind images of people bent under heavy loads, maybe of cotton, or maybe just any sort of heavy load carried by African-Americans in Harlem and elsewhere.

The opening question ("What happens to a dream deferred?") was followed by four questions in seven lines, but now, with "Maybe it just sags / like a heavy load" we get a statement, as though the poet at last has found an answer. But at the end we get one more question, set off by itself and in italics: "Or does it explode?" This line itself is explosive for four reasons: It is short, it is italicized, it is a metaphor rather than a simile, and it is a stanza in itself. It's also interesting that this line, unlike the earlier lines, does not use a simile. It's almost as though Hughes is saying, "OK, we've had enough fancy ways of talking about this terrible situation; here it is, straight."

A Brief Overview of the Essay

• The **title of the essay** merely names the author and the work. Normally, an essay ought to have a more interesting title, something created by the essayist and something that at least hints at the essayist's thesis, but in this instance, where the assignment was simply to write an explication of the work, Tim Clark's title is acceptable.

• The **opening paragraph** provides a helpful overview. An explication begins at the beginning and continues to the end of the work or the part of the work that is being examined, but an introductory paragraph usually is welcome. Notice, too, that although explication is chiefly concerned with explaining (unpacking, unfolding) the meanings of words, because it is essentially concerned with the *meaning* of a literary work it can and should take account of anything that contributes to the meaning. In this instance, Tim astutely points out that the appearance on the page (the indentation of certain lines) is a part of the meaning.

• The **organization** of an explication is almost never a problem, because, as we just mentioned, the essayist usually proceeds through the work, from start to finish. But notice that Tim does not just say, "In the next line . . . ," and "In the following line. . . ." When appropriate, he summarizes and he contrasts: "The seven lines with four comparisons are followed by a stanza of two lines with just one comparison."

• The **concluding paragraph** wraps things up nicely. It begins by referring to the beginning ("The opening question"), moves to the last line of the poem ("Or does it explode?"), and comments effectively on this last line. Notice that the comment is **an argument, not merely an unsupported assertion.** It indeed begins with an assertion ("This line itself is explosive") but, and this is important, it offers **evidence** for the assertion that the line is explosive: "It is short, it is italicized, it is a metaphor rather than a simile, and it is a stanza in itself." That is, Tim gives reasons, a sure sign of an argument. If he had merely said something like "This line seems very powerful to me," we would well say that he is giving a personal opinion but not saying anything that can help us to see things his way.

Topics for Discussion

1. Tim Clark's explication suggests that the comparison with "a syrupy sweet" deliberately misleads the reader into thinking the ending will be happy, and it thus serves to make the real ending even more powerful. In class another student suggested that Hughes may be referring to African-Americans who play Uncle Tom, people who adopt a smiling manner to cope with an oppressive society. Which explanation do you prefer, and why? What do you think of combining the two?
2. When this poem was reprinted in Hughes's *Selected Poems* (1959), it was titled "Dream Deferred." How do the different titles affect your response to, and explication of, the poem?

Note: Another explication (of W. B. Yeats's "The Balloon of the Mind") appears in Chapter 12.

✔ A Checklist: Drafting an Explication

Overall Considerations

- ❑ Does the poem imply a story of some sort, for instance, the speaker's report of a love affair, or of a response to nature? If so, what is its beginning, middle, and end?
- ❑ If you detect a story in the speaker's mind, a change of mood—for instance, a shift from bitterness that a love affair has ended to hope for its renewal—is this change communicated in part by the connotations of certain words? By syntax? By metrical shifts?

Detailed Considerations

- ❑ If the poem has a title other than the first line, what are the implications of the title?
- ❑ Are there clusters or patterns of imagery—for instance, religious or economic images, or images drawn from nature? If so, how do they contribute to the meaning of the poem?
- ❑ Is irony (understatement or overstatement) used? To what effect?
- ❑ How do the connotations of certain words (for example, "dad" rather than "father") help to establish the meaning?
- ❑ What are the implications of the syntax—for instance, of notably simple or notably complex sentences? What do such sentences tell us about the speaker?
- ❑ Do metrical variations occur, and if so, what is their significance?
- ❑ Do rhyming words have some meaningful connection, as in the clichés "moon" and "June," "dove" and "love"?
- ❑ What are the implications of the appearance of the poem on the page—for example, of an indented line or of the stanzaic pattern? (For instance, if the poem consists of two stanzas of four lines each, does the second stanza offer a reversal of the first?)

ANALYSIS: THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

Explication is a method used chiefly in the study of fairly short poems or brief extracts from essays, stories, novels, and plays. Of course, if one has world enough and time one can set out to explicate all of *The Color Purple* or *Hamlet;* more likely, one will explicate only a paragraph or at

most a page of the novel and a speech or two of the play. In writing about works longer than a page or two, a more common approach than explicating is **analyzing** (literally, separating into parts in order better to understand the whole). An analysis of, say, *The Color Purple* may consider the functions of the setting, or the uses that certain minor characters serve; an analysis of *Hamlet* may consider the comic passages or the reasons for Hamlet's delay; an analysis of *Death of a Salesman* may consider the depiction of women or the causes of Willy Loman's failure.

Analysis is not a process used only in talking about literature. It is commonly applied in thinking about almost any complex matter: Venus Williams plays a deadly game of tennis. What does her serve do to her opponent? How does her backhand contribute? And so it makes sense, if you are writing about literature, to examine one or more of the components of the work, to see how they contribute to the whole, either as part of a stylistic pattern or as part of the meaning. In Chapter 6, we will see, for example, how the meter of Frost's "The Span of Life" contributes to the meaning—heavy stresses for the line about the tired old dog, fewer and lighter stresses for the line about the puppy.

Although other chapters of this book include specimens of analytic criticism, for instance, of a proverb ("A rolling stone gathers no moss") and of short poems by Robert Frost and Pat Mora, a brief analysis of a very short story about King Solomon may be useful here. Because the story is short, the analysis can consider most of the story's parts, and therefore the analysis can seem relatively complete.

The following story about King Solomon, customarily called "The Judgment of Solomon," appears in the Hebrew Bible, in the latter part of the third chapter of the book called 1 Kings or First Kings, probably written in the mid-sixth century BCE. The translation is from the King James Version of the Bible (1611). Two expressions in the story need clarification: (1) The woman who "overlaid" her child in her sleep rolled over on the child and suffocated it; (2) it is said of the other woman that her "bowels yearned upon her son"—that is, her heart longed for her son. (Among the early Hebrews, the bowels were thought to be the seat of emotion.)

> Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. And the one woman said, "O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house, and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also, and we were together; there was no stranger in the house, save we two in the house. And this woman's child died in the night, because she overlaid it. And she rose at midnight, and

took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead; but when I considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear."

And the other woman said, "Nay, but the living son is my son, and the dead is thy son." And this said, "No, but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son." Thus they spoke before the king.

Then said the king, "The one said, 'This is my son that liveth, and thy son is dead.' And the other said, 'Nay, but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living.'" And the king said, "Bring me a sword." And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, "Divide the living child in two and give half to the one, and half to the other."

Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the other said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it."

Then the king answered and said, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. She is the mother thereof."

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged, and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

Thinking about Form

Let's begin by analyzing the *form*, or the shape, of the story. One form or shape that we notice is this: The story moves from a problem to a solution. We can also say, still speaking of the overall form, that the story moves from quarreling and talk of death to unity and talk of life. In short, it has a happy ending, a form that (because it provides an optimistic view of life and also a sense of completeness) gives pleasure to most people.

In thinking about a work of literature, it is always useful to take notice of the basic form of the whole, the overall structural pattern. Doubtless you are already familiar with many basic patterns, for example, tragedy (joy yielding to sorrow) and romantic comedy (angry conflict yielding to joyful union). If you think even briefly about verbal works, you'll notice the structures or patterns that govern songs, episodes in soap operas, political speeches (beginning with the candidate's expression of pleasure at being in Duluth, and ending with "God bless you all"), detective stories, Westerns, and so on. And just as viewers of a Western film inevitably experience one Western in the context of others, so readers inevitably experience one story in the context of similar stories, and one poem in the context of others.

Thinking about Character

Second, we can say that "The Judgment of Solomon" is a detective story:

- There is a death, followed by
- a conflict in the testimony of the witnesses, and
- a solution by a shrewd outsider.

Consider Solomon's predicament. Ordinarily in literature characters are sharply defined and individualized, yet the essence of a detective story is that the culprit should not be easily recognized as wicked, and here nothing seems to distinguish the two petitioners. Solomon is confronted by "two women, that were harlots" (that is, immoral women, prostitutes). Until late in the story—that is, up to the time Solomon suggests dividing the child—they are described only as "the one woman," "the other woman," "the one," "the other."

Does the story suffer from weak characterization? If we think analytically about this issue, we realize that the point surely is to make the women as alike as possible, so that we cannot tell which of the two is speaking the truth. Like Solomon, we have nothing to go on; neither witness is known to be more honest than the other, and there are no other witnesses to support or refute either woman.

Thoughts about Other Possibilities

Analysis is concerned with

- seeing the relationships between the parts of a work, but
- analysis also may take note of what is *not* in the work.

An additional witness would destroy the story or at least turn it into an utterly different story. Another thing missing from this story is an explicit editorial comment or interpretation, except for the remark at the end, that the people "feared the king." If we had read the story in the Geneva Bible (1557–60), which is the translation of the Bible that Shakespeare was familiar with, we would have found a marginal comment: "Her motherly affection herein appeareth that she had rather endure the rigour of the lawe, than see her child cruelly slaine." Would you agree that it is better, at least in this story, for the reader to draw conclusions than for the storyteller explicitly to point them out?

Solomon wisely contrives a situation in which these two claimants, who seem so similar, will reveal their true natures: The mother will reveal her love, and the liar will reveal her hard heart. The early symmetry (the

identity of the two women) pleases a reader, and so does the device by which we can at last distinguish between the two women.

But even near the end there is a further symmetry. To save the child's life, the true mother gives up her claim, crying out, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." The author (or, rather, the translator who produced this part of the King James Version) takes these very words, with no change whatsoever, and puts them into Solomon's mouth as the king's final judgment. Solomon too says, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it," but now the sentence takes on a new meaning. In the first sentence, "her" refers to the liar (the true mother will give the child to "her"); in Solomon's sentence, "her" refers to the true mother: "Give her the living child. . . ." Surely we take pleasure in the fact that the very words by which the mother renounces her child (1) are the words that reveal to Solomon the truth and (2) are the words Solomon uses to restore the child to its mother.

This analysis has chiefly talked about the relations of parts, and especially it has tried to explain why the two women in this story are *not* distinct, until Solomon finds a way to reveal their distinctive natures: If the story is to demonstrate Solomon's wisdom, the women must seem identical until Solomon can show that they differ. But the analysis could have gone into some other topic. Let's consider several possibilities.

A student might begin by asking this question: "Although it is important for the women to be highly similar, why are they harlots?" (It is too simple to say that the women in the story are harlots because the author is faithfully reporting a historical episode in Solomon's career. The story is widely recognized as a folktale, found also in other ancient cultures.) One possible reason for making the women harlots is that the story demands that there be no witnesses; by using harlots, the author disposed of husbands, parents, and siblings who might otherwise be expected to live with the women. A second possible reason is that the author wanted to show that Solomon's justice extended to all, not only to respectable folk. Third, perhaps the author wished to reject or at least to complicate the stereotype of the harlot as a thoroughly disreputable person. He did this by introducing another (and truer?) stereotype, the mother as motivated by overwhelming maternal love.

Comparison: An Analytic Tool

> If you really want to see something, look at something else.
>
> —Howard Nemerov

Analysis frequently involves comparing: Things are examined for their resemblances to and differences from other things. Strictly speaking, if one

emphasizes the differences rather than the similarities, one is contrasting rather than comparing, but we need not preserve this distinction; we can call both processes *comparing*.

Although your instructor may ask you to write a comparison of two works of literature, the *subject* of the essay is the works; comparison is simply an effective analytic technique to show some of the qualities in the works. You might compare Chopin's use of nature in "The Story of an Hour" (page 24) with the use of nature in another story, to reveal the subtle differences between the stories, but a comparison of works utterly unlike can hardly tell the reader or the writer anything.

Something should be said about organizing a comparison, say between the settings in two stories, between two characters in a novel (or even between a character at the end of a novel and the same character at the beginning), or between the symbolism of two poems. Probably, a student's first thought after making some jottings is to discuss one half of the comparison and then go on to the second half. Instructors and textbooks (though not this one) usually condemn such an organization, arguing that the essay breaks into two parts and that the second part involves a good deal of repetition of categories set up in the first part. Usually, they recommend that the students organize their thoughts differently, somewhat along these lines:

1. First similarity
   a. first work (or character, or characteristic)
   b. second work
2. Second similarity
   a. first work
   b. second work
3. First difference
   a. first work
   b. second work
4. Second difference
   a. first work
   b. second work

and so on, for as many additional differences as seem relevant. If one wishes to compare *Huckleberry Finn* with *The Catcher in the Rye*, one may organize the material thus:

1. First similarity: the narrator and his quest
   a. Huck
   b. Holden

2. Second similarity: the corrupt world surrounding the narrator
   a. society in *Huck*
   b. society in *Catcher*
3. First difference: degree to which the narrator fulfills his quest and escapes from society
   a. Huck's plan to "light out" to the frontier
   b. Holden's breakdown

Another way of organizing a comparison and contrast:

1. First point: the narrator and his quest
   a. similarities between Huck and Holden
   b. differences between Huck and Holden
2. Second point: the corrupt world
   a. similarities between the worlds in *Huck* and *Catcher*
   b. differences between the worlds in *Huck* and *Catcher*
3. Third point: degree of success
   a. similarities between Huck and Holden
   b. differences between Huck and Holden

A comparison need not employ either of these structures. There is even the danger that an essay employing either of them may not come into focus until the essayist stands back from the seven-layer cake and announces in the concluding paragraph that the odd layers taste better. In one's preparatory thinking, one may want to make comparisons in pairs (good-natured humor: the clown in *Othello,* the clownish grave digger in *Hamlet;* social satire: the clown in *Othello,* the grave digger in *Hamlet;* relevance to main theme: . . .; length of role: . . .; comments by other characters: . . .), but one must come to some conclusions about what these add up to before writing the final version.

This final version should not duplicate the thought processes; rather, it should be organized so as to make the point—the thesis—clearly and effectively. After reflection, one may believe that although there are superficial similarities between the clown in *Othello* and the clownish grave digger in *Hamlet*, there are essential differences; then in the finished essay one probably will not wish to obscure the main point by jumping back and forth from play to play, working through a series of similarities and differences. It may be better to discuss the clown in *Othello* and then to point out that, although the grave digger in *Hamlet* resembles him in A, B, and C, the grave digger also has other functions (D, E, and F) and is of greater consequence to *Hamlet* than the clown is to *Othello.* Some repetition in the second half of the essay ("The grave digger's puns come even faster than the clown's. . . .") will bind the two halves into a meaningful whole, making clear the degree of similarity or difference. The point of the essay presumably is not to list pairs of similarities or differences but to illuminate a work or works by making thoughtful comparisons.

Although in a long essay one cannot postpone until halfway through a discussion of the second half of the comparison, in an essay of fewer than ten pages nothing is wrong with setting forth one half of the comparison and then, in light of it, the second half. The essay will break into two unrelated parts if the second half makes no use of the first or if it fails to modify the first half, but not if the second half looks back to the first half and calls attention to differences that the new material reveals.

Finally, a reminder: The purpose of a comparison is to call attention to the unique features of something by holding it up against something similar but significantly different. You can compare Macbeth with Banquo (two men who hear a prophecy but who respond differently), or Macbeth with Lady Macbeth (a husband and wife, both eager to be monarchs but differing in their sense of the consequences), or Hamlet and Holden Caulfield (two people who see themselves as surrounded by a corrupt world), but you can hardly compare Holden with Macbeth or with Lady Macbeth—there simply are not enough points of resemblance to make it worth your effort to call attention to subtle differences.

✍ A RULE FOR WRITERS:

In making a comparison, do not simply make a list of similarities or of differences; make a *point*.

✔ A Checklist: Revising a Comparison

- ❑ Does it make sense to compare these things? What question will the comparison help to answer? What do you hope your reader will learn?
- ❑ Is the point of the comparison—the reason for making it—clear?
- ❑ Does the comparison cover all significant similarities and differences?
- ❑ Is the comparison readable; that is, is it clear and yet not tediously mechanical?

- ❑ Is the organization that is used—perhaps treating one text first, and then the other, or perhaps shifting back and forth between texts—the best way to make this comparison?
- ❑ If the essay offers a value judgment, is the judgment fair? Does the essay offer enough evidence to bring a reader into at least partial agreement?

FINDING A TOPIC

All literary works afford their own topics for analysis, and all essayists must set forth their own theses, but a few useful generalizations may be made. You can often find a thesis by asking one of two questions:

1. **What is this doing?** That is, why is this scene in the novel or play? Why is Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in two acts, rather than one or three? Why the biblical allusions in *Waiting for Godot*? Why does Hamlet delay? Why are these lines unrhymed? Why is this stanza form employed? What is the significance of the parts of the work?

If you don't know where to begin, think about the title. Titles are often highly significant parts of the work: Ibsen explained that he called his play *Hedda Gabler* rather than *Hedda Tesman* because "She is to be regarded as her father's daughter rather than as her husband's wife." But of course there are other ways of beginning. If the work is a poem, you may be able to get a start by considering the stanza form or the chief images. If the work is a story or play, you might consider the relation between the chief character and the second most important character.

2. **Why do I have this response?** Why do I find this poem clever or moving or puzzling? How did the author make this character funny or dignified or pathetic? How did he or she communicate the idea that this character is a bore without boring me? Why am I troubled by the representation of women in this story? Why do I regard as sexist this lover's expression of his love?

The first of these questions, "What is this doing?" requires that you identify yourself with the author, wondering, for example, whether this opening scene is the best possible for this story.

The second question, "Why do I have this response?" requires that you trust your feelings. If you are amused or bored or puzzled or annoyed, assume that these responses are appropriate and follow them up, at least until a rereading of the work provides other responses.

CONSIDERING THE EVIDENCE

Once your responses have led you to a topic ("The Clown in *Othello*") and then to a thesis ("The clown is relevant"), be certain that you have all the evidence. Usually this means that you should study the context of the material you are discussing. For example, if you are writing about *The Catcher in the Rye*, before you argue that because Holden distrusts the adult world, "old" is his ultimate word of condemnation, remember that he speaks of "old Phoebe" and of "old Thomas Hardy," both of whom he values greatly.

ORGANIZING THE MATERIAL

"Begin at the beginning," the King of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* said very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop." This is how your paper should seem to the reader, but it need not have been drafted thus.

After locating a topic, converting it into a thesis, and weighing the evidence, a writer has the job of organizing the material into a coherent whole, a sequence of paragraphs that holds the reader's interest (partly because it sets forth material clearly) and that steadily builds up an effective argument. Notice that in the essay on irony (pages 44–45) in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," the student wisely moves from the lesser ironies to the chief irony. To begin with the chief irony and end with the lesser ironies would almost surely be anticlimactic.

The organization of an essay will depend on the nature of the essay: An essay on foreshadowing in *Macbeth* probably will be organized chronologically (material in the first act will be discussed before material in the second act), but an essay on the character of Macbeth may conceivably begin with the end of the play, discussing Macbeth as he is in the fifth act, and then may work backward through the play, arriving at last at the original Macbeth, so to speak, of the beginning of the play.

The important point is not that there is only one way to organize an essay, but that you find the way that seems best for the particular topic and argument. Once you think you know more or less what you want to say, you will usually, after trial and error, find what seems the best way of communicating it to a reader. An outline will help you find your way, but don't assume that once you have settled on an outline the organization of your essay finally is established. After you read the draft that you

base on your outline, you may realize that a more effective organization will be more helpful to your reader—which means that you must move paragraphs around, revise your transitions, and, in short, produce another draft.

If you look at your draft and outline it, as suggested on pages 40–41, you will quickly see whether the draft needs to be reorganized.

COMMUNICATING JUDGMENTS

Because a critical essay is a judicious attempt to help a reader see what is going on in a work or in a part of a work, the voice of the critic usually sounds, on first hearing, impartial; but good criticism includes—at least implicitly—evaluation. The critic may say not only that the setting changes (a neutral expression) but also that "the novelist aptly shifts the setting" or "unconvincingly describes . . . " or "effectively juxtaposes. . . ." These evaluations are supported with evidence. The critic has feelings about the work under discussion and reveals them, not by continually saying "I feel" and "This moves me," but by calling attention to the degree of success or failure perceived.

Nothing is wrong with occasionally using *I*, and noticeable avoidances of it—"it is seen that," "this writer," "the present writer," "we," and the like—suggest sham modesty; but too much talk of "I" makes a writer sound self-absorbed, as if he or she were writing to himself or herself, not to a reader.

Consider this sentence from the opening paragraph in a review of George Orwell's *1984*.

> I do not think I have ever read a novel more frightening and depressing; and yet, such are the originality, the suspense, the speed of writing and withering indignation that it is impossible to put the book down.

Fine—provided that the reviewer goes on to offer evidence that enables readers to share his or her evaluation of *1984*.

One final remark on communicating judgments: Write sincerely. Any attempt to neglect your own thoughtful responses and replace them with fabrications designed to please an instructor will surely fail. It is hard enough to find the words that clearly communicate your responses; it is almost impossible to find the words that express your guess about what your instructor expects your responses to be.

REVIEW: HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE ESSAY

1. Pre-writing

Read the work carefully. You may, on this first reading, want to highlight or annotate certain things, such as passages that please or that puzzle, or you may prefer simply to read it through. In any case, on a second reading you will certainly want to annotate the text and jot down notes either in the margins or in a journal. You probably are not focusing on a specific topic but rather are taking account of your early responses to the work.

If you have a feeling or an idea, jot it down; don't assume that you will remember it when you get around to drafting your essay. Write it down so that you will be sure to remember it and so that in the act of writing it down you can improve it.

2. Drafting

After reviewing your notes and sorting them out, you will find that you have not only a topic (a subject to write about) but a thesis (a point to be made, an argument). Get it down on paper. Perhaps begin by jotting down your thesis and under it a tentative outline.

If you are writing an explication, the order is essentially the order of the lines or of the episodes. If you are writing an analysis, you may wish to organize your essay from the lesser material to the greater (to avoid anticlimax) or from the simple to the complex (to ensure intelligibility). If you are discussing the roles of three characters in a story, it may be best to build up to the one of the three that you think the most important. If you are comparing two characters, it may be best to move from the most obvious contrasts to the least obvious.

At this stage, however, don't worry about whether the organization is unquestionably the best possible organization for your topic. A page of paper with some ideas in some sort of sequence, however rough, will encourage you that you do have something to say. If you have doubts, by all means record them. By writing down your uncertainties, you will begin to feel your way toward tentative explanations of them.

Almost any organization will help you get going on your draft; that is, it will help you start writing an essay. The process of writing will itself clarify and improve your preliminary ideas. If you are like most people, you can't do much precise thinking until you have committed to paper at

least a rough sketch of your initial ideas. Later, you can push and polish your ideas into shape, perhaps even deleting all of them and starting over, but it's a lot easier to improve your ideas once you see them in front of you than it is to do the job in your head. On paper, one word leads to another; in your head, one word often blocks another.

Although we have been talking about drafting, most teachers rightly regard this first effort at organizing one's notes and turning them into an essay not as a first draft but as a zero draft, really a part of pre-writing. When you reread it, you will doubtless find passages that need further support, passages that seem out of place, and passages that need clarification. You will also find passages that are better than you thought at the outset you could produce. In any case, on rereading the zero draft you will find things that will require you to go back and check the work of literature and to think further about what you have said about it. After rereading the literary work and your draft, you are in a position to write something that can rightly be called a first draft.

3. Revising

Try to allow at least a day to elapse before you start to revise your zero draft and another day before you revise your first draft. If you come to the material with a relatively fresh eye, you may see that the thesis needs to be announced earlier or more clearly or that certain points need to be supported by concrete references—perhaps by brief quotations from the literary work. A review by your peers will give you a good sense of which things need clarification and of whether your discussion is adequately organized.

At this stage, pay special attention to the following matters.

The Title If you haven't already jotted down a tentative title for your essay, now is the time to do so. Make sure that the title is interesting and informative. There is nothing interesting and there is very little that is informative in a title such as "On a Play by Arthur Miller," or even in "On *Death of a Salesman*." Such titles are adequate to get you going, but as you think about your draft, come up with something more focused, such as "The Women in *Death of a Salesman*" (this title announces the topic) or "A Feminist Reading of *Death of a Salesman*" (this title announces the approach). Thinking about the title will help you to write an essay that is focused.

The Opening Your introductory sentences or paragraphs should engage the reader's interest. It's usually desirable also to give the reader the necessary information concerning which work you are writing about, to indicate your thesis (this information itself may get the reader's interest), and to indicate what your organization will be. Here is a sample that does all of these things:

> Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman is so much a play about a salesman that one hardly thinks about the other characters, except perhaps for his wife, Linda. But there are other women in the play, too, and this essay will examine Miller's depiction of them, beginning with the briefest sketches and going to Miller's fullest picture of a woman, Linda Loman. Given that the play is chiefly about Willy Loman, and given that Miller wrote it about fifty years ago, we might not expect the representation of women to be as insightful as in fact it is.

Again, this opening paragraph

- identifies the author and the work (Miller's *Death of a Salesman*), and it
- indicates the topic (women), the thesis (Miller's depiction is surprisingly insightful), and the structure (from minor characters to a major character).

Notice, by the way, the writer says "this essay will examine." That's perfectly all right, but the use of the first person, "I," is entirely acceptable provided that the writer does not use it so often that he or she sounds like an egomaniac. (For further discussion of introductory paragraphs, see pages 286–288.)

The Thesis and the Organization In addition to announcing your thesis early—perhaps in the title or in the opening paragraph—be sure to keep the thesis in view throughout the essay. For instance, if you are arguing that Miller's depiction of women is surprisingly sympathetic, you will say so, and you will reaffirm the point during the essay, when you present supporting evidence.

Similarly, even if you have announced the organization, you will keep the reader posted by occasionally saying such things as "One other minor character must be looked at," and "The last minor character that we will

look at," and "With Linda Loman, the most important woman in the play." And you will make the organization clear to your readers by using the appropriate lead-ins and transitions, such as "Furthermore," "On the other hand," "The final example. . . ."

The Closing Say something more interesting than "Thus we see," followed by a repetition of the thesis sentence. Among the tested and effective ways of ending effectively are these: (1) Glance back to something from the opening paragraph, thus giving your essay a sense of closure; (2) offer a new bit of evidence, thus driving the point home; or (3) indicate that the thesis, now established, can be used in other investigations of comparable material, for instance, in a discussion of Miller's later plays. (For further discussion of concluding paragraphs, see pages 288–289.)

4. Editing

Small-scale revision, such as checking the spelling, punctuation, and accuracy of quotations, is usually called *editing*. Even when you get to this stage, you may unexpectedly find that you must make larger revisions. In checking a quotation, you may find that it doesn't really support the point you are making, so you may have to do some substantial revising.

Print a clean copy, following the principles concerning margins, pagination, and documentation set forth later in this book. If you have borrowed any ideas, be sure to give credit to your sources. Finally, proofread, make corrections, and print the final copy.

✍ A RULE FOR WRITERS:

The words that you put on the page will convey an image of you to the reader; make sure that the image is favorable.

✔ Editing Checklist: Questions to Ask Yourself When Editing

- ❑ Is the title of my essay informative and interesting?
- ❑ Do I identify the subject of my essay (author and title) early?
- ❑ What is my thesis? Do I state it soon enough (perhaps even in the title) and keep it in view?

- ❑ Is the organization reasonable? Does each point lead into the next without irrelevancies and without anticlimaxes?
- ❑ Is each paragraph unified by a topic sentence or a topic idea? Are there adequate transitions from one paragraph to the next?
- ❑ Are generalizations supported by appropriate concrete details, especially by brief quotations from the text?
- ❑ Is the opening paragraph interesting and, by its end, focused on the topic? Is the final paragraph conclusive without being repetitive?
- ❑ Is the tone appropriate? No sarcasm, no apologies, no condescension?
- ❑ If there is a summary, is it as brief as possible, given its purpose?
- ❑ Are the quotations adequately introduced, and are they accurate? Do they provide evidence and let the reader hear the author's voice, or do they merely add words to the essay?
- ❑ Is the present tense used to describe the author's work and the action of the work ("Shakespeare *shows*," "Hamlet *dies*")?
- ❑ Have I kept in mind the needs of my audience, for instance, by defining unfamiliar terms, or by briefly summarizing works or opinions that the reader may be unfamiliar with?
- ❑ Is documentation provided where necessary?
- ❑ Are the spelling and punctuation correct? Are other mechanical matters (such as margins, spacing, and citations) in correct form? Have I proofread carefully?
- ❑ Is the paper properly identified—author's name, instructor's name, course number, and date?

5

OTHER KINDS OF WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

The best of all ways to make one's reading valuable is to write about it.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

A SUMMARY

The essay on "The Story of an Hour" in Chapter 3 does not include a *summary* because the writer knew that all of her readers were thoroughly familiar with Chopin's story. Sometimes, however, it is advisable to summarize the work you are writing about, thus reminding a reader who has not read the work recently, or even informing a reader who may never have read the work. A review of a new work of literature or of a new film usually includes a summary, on the assumption that readers are unfamiliar with it.

A summary is a brief restatement or condensation of the plot. Consider this summary of Chopin's "The Story of an Hour":

> A newspaper office reports that Brently Mallard has been killed in a railroad accident. When the news is gently broken to Mrs. Mallard by her sister Josephine, Mrs. Mallard weeps wildly and then shuts herself up in her room, where she sinks into an armchair. Staring dully through the window, she sees the signs of spring, and then an unnameable sensation possesses her. She tries to reject it but finally abandons herself to it. Renewed, she exults in her freedom, in the thought that at last the days will be her own. She finally

> comes out of the room, embraces her sister, and descends the stairs. A moment later her husband—who in fact had not been in the accident—enters. Mrs. Mallard dies—of the joy that kills, according to the doctors' diagnosis.

Here are a few principles that govern summaries:

- A summary is much briefer than the original. It is not a paraphrase—a word-by-word translation of someone's words into your own. A paraphrase is usually at least as long as the original, whereas a summary is rarely longer than one-fourth of the original and is usually much shorter. A novel may be summarized in a few paragraphs, or even in one paragraph.
- A summary usually achieves its brevity by omitting almost all of the concrete details of the original and by omitting minor characters and episodes. Notice that the summary of "The Story of an Hour" omits the friend of the family, omits specifying the signs of spring, and omits the business of the sister imploring Mrs. Mallard to open the door.
- A summary is as accurate as possible, given the limits of space. It must not misrepresent the basic ideas of the original. It may, however, be markedly different from the original in style. For instance, if the original is verbose, the summary will nevertheless be concise, and if the original is in a highly formal style the summary may nevertheless be in a middle style, the style typical of this textbook. There is a contradiction here: We say that a summary must be accurate, but that it need not reproduce the style or tone of the original, yet elsewhere in this book we argue that a writer's tone is part of the meaning. Here we seem to be saying that the meaning can be separated from the tone. But the "meaning" we now are talking about is large-scale meaning (for example, the basic argument, the summary of a plot), not small-scale meaning (subtle details).
- A summary is normally written in the present tense. Thus "A newspaper office reports . . . , Mrs. Mallard weeps. . . ."
- If the summary is brief (say, fewer than 250 words), it may be given as a single paragraph. If you are summarizing a long work, you may feel that a longer summary is needed. In this case your reader will be grateful to you if you divide the summary into paragraphs. As you draft your summary, you may find natural divisions. For instance, the scene of

the story may change midway, providing you with the opportunity to use two paragraphs. Or you may want to summarize a five-act play in five paragraphs.

Summaries have their place in essays, but remember that a summary is not an analysis; it is only a summary.

A PARAPHRASE

A paraphrase is a restatement—a sort of translation into the same language—of material that may in its original form be somewhat obscure to a reader. A native speaker of English will not need a paraphrase of "Thirty days hath September," though a non-native speaker might be puzzled by two things, the meaning of *hath* and the inverted word order. For such a reader, "September has thirty days" would be a helpful paraphrase.

Although a paraphrase seeks to clarify the original, if the original is even a little more complex than "Thirty days hath September" the paraphrase will—in the process of clarifying something—lose something, since the substitution of one word for another will change the meaning. For instance, "Shut up" and "Be quiet" do not say exactly the same thing; the former (in addition to asking for quiet) says that the speaker is rude, or perhaps it says that the speaker feels he can treat his listener contemptuously, but the paraphrase loses all of this.

Still, a paraphrase can be helpful as a first step in helping a reader to understand a line that includes an obsolete word or phrase, or a word or phrase that is current in only one region. In a poem by Emily Dickinson (1830–86), the following line appears:

> The sun engrossed the East.

Engrossed here has (perhaps among other meanings) a special commercial meaning, "to acquire most or all of a commodity; to monopolize the market," and so a paraphrase of the line might go thus:

> The sun took over all of the east.

(It's worth mentioning that you should have at your elbow a good desk dictionary, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, fourth edition. Writers—especially poets—expect you to pay close attention to every word. If a word puzzles you, look it up.)

Idioms, as well as words, may puzzle a reader. The Anglo-Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) begins one poem with

> The friends that have it I do wrong . . .

Because the idiom "to have it" (meaning "to believe that," "to think that") is unfamiliar to many American readers today, a discussion of the poem might include a paraphrase—a rewording, a translation into more familiar language, such as

> The friends who think that I am doing the wrong thing . . .

Perhaps the rest of the poem is immediately clear, but in any case here is the entire poem, followed by a paraphrase:

> The friends that have it I do wrong
> When ever I remake a song,
> Should know what issue is at stake:
> It is myself that I remake.

Now for the paraphrase:

> The friends who think that I am doing the wrong thing when I revise one of my poems should be informed what the important issue is; I'm not just revising a poem; rather, I am revising myself (my thoughts, feelings).

Here, as with any paraphrase, the meaning is not translated exactly; there is some distortion. If *song* in the original is clarified by *poem* in the paraphrase, it is also altered; the paraphrase loses the sense of lyricism that is implicit in *song*. Further, "Should know what issue is at stake" (in the original) is ambiguous. Does *should* mean "ought," as in "You should know better than to speak so rudely," or does it mean "deserve to be informed," as in "You deserve to know that I am thinking about quitting"? This paraphrase deals with the entire poem, and your instructor may ask you to paraphrase a short poem, but normally one paraphrases only a few lines, or even only a phrase.

Granted that a paraphrase may miss a great deal, a paraphrase often helps you, or your reader, to understand at least the surface meaning, and the act of paraphrasing will usually help you to understand at least some of the implicit meaning. Furthermore, a paraphrase makes you see that the original writer's words are better than any words we might substitute.

A PARODY

One special kind of response is the **parody,** a comic form that imitates the original in a humorous way. It is a caricature in words. A parody may imitate the style of the original—let's say, short, punchy sentences—but apply this style to a subject that the original author would not be concerned with. Thus, because Ernest Hemingway often wrote short, simple sentences about tough guys engaged in activities such as hunting, fishing, and boxing, parodists of Hemingway are likely to use the same style but for their subject they may choose something like opening the mail, or preparing a cup of tea.

We once heard on the radio a parody of an announcer doing a baseball game. It went something like this:

> Well, here's Bill Shakespeare now, approaching the desk. Like so many other writers, Bill likes to work at a desk. In fact, just about every writer we know writes at a desk, but every writer has his own way of approaching the desk and sitting at it. Bill is sitting down now; now he's adjusting the chair, moving it forward a little. Oh, he's just pushed the chair back an inch or two. He likes his chair to be just right. Now he's picking up a pen. It's a gray quill. I think it's the pen he uses when he writes a tragedy, and he's due for a tragedy—of his last five plays, only one was a tragedy, and two were comedies and two were history plays. But you never can tell with Bill, or "The Bard" as his fans call him. Some people call him "The Swan of Avon," but I'm told that he really hates that. Well, he's at the desk, and, you know, in circumstances like these, he might even sneak in a sonnet or two. Oh, he's put down the gray quill, and now he's trying a white one. Oh boy, oh boy, he's written a *word.* NO, he's going for *a whole sentence!*

Parodies are, in a way, critical, but they are usually affectionate, too. In the best parodies one feels that the writer admires the author being parodied. The distinguished sociologist Daniel Bell wrote a deliberate parody—perhaps not an affectionate one—of sociological writing. It begins thus:

> The purpose of this scene is to present a taxonomic dichotomization which would allow for unilinear comparison. In this fashion we could hope to distinguish the relevant variables which determine the functional specificities of social movements.

The journalist H. L. Mencken (1880–1956), who had a love–hate relationship with what he called the Great American Booboisie, wrote a parody in which he set forth the Declaration of Independence as it might have been written (or spoken) by Joe Sixpack in the mid-twentieth century. Here the target is not the original document, but the twentieth-century American. The original document, you will remember, begins in this way:

> When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Now for Mencken's version:

> When things get so balled up that the people of a country got to cut loose from some other country, and go it on their own hook, without asking no permission from nobody, excepting maybe God Almighty, then they ought to let everybody know why they done it, so that everybody can see they are not trying to put nothing over on nobody.

A REVIEW

A review also is a response; it normally includes an evaluation of the work, but at least at first glance it may seem to be an analytic essay. Here we will consider a review of a production of a play, but you can easily adapt this discussion to a review of a book.

A Review of a Dramatic Production

A review requires analytic skill, but it is not identical with an analysis. First, a reviewer normally assumes that the reader is unfamiliar with the production being reviewed and also with the play if the play is not a classic. The first paragraph usually provides a helpful introduction along these lines:

> Marsha Norman's play *'night, Mother,* a tragedy with only two actors and one set, shows us a woman's preparation for suicide. Jessie has concluded that she no longer wishes to live, and so she tries to put her affairs in order, which chiefly means preparing her rather uncomprehending mother to get along without her.

Inevitably some retelling of the plot is necessary if the play is new, and a summary of a sentence or two is acceptable even for a familiar play. The review will, however, chiefly be concerned with

describing,

analyzing, and

evaluating.

If the play is new, much of the evaluation may center on the play itself, but if the play is a classic, the evaluation probably will chiefly be devoted to the acting, the set, and the direction. Other points:

1. **Save the program;** it will give you the names of the actors and perhaps a brief biography of the author, a synopsis of the plot, and a photograph of the set, all of which may be helpful.
2. **Draft your review as soon as possible,** while the performance is still fresh in your mind. If you cannot draft it immediately after seeing the play, at least jot down some notes about the setting and the staging, the acting, and the audience's response.
3. **If possible, read the play**—ideally, before the performance and again after it.
4. **In your first draft, don't worry about limitations of space;** write as long a review as you can, putting down everything that comes to mind. Later you can cut it to the required length, retaining only the chief points and the necessary supporting details, but in your first draft try to produce a fairly full record of the performance and your response to it, so that a day or two later, when you revise, you won't have to trust a fading memory for details.

A Sample Review: "An Effective Macbeth"

If you read reviews of plays in *Time, Newsweek,* or a newspaper, you will soon develop a sense of what reviews normally do. The following example, an undergraduate's review of a production of *Macbeth,* is typical except in one respect: As has been mentioned, reviews of new plays customarily include a few sentences summarizing the plot and classifying the play (a tragedy, a farce, a rock musical), perhaps briefly putting it into the context of the author's other works, but because *Macbeth* is so widely known, the reviewer has chosen not to tell her readers that *Macbeth* is a tragedy by Shakespeare.

Preliminary Jottings During the two intermissions and immediately after the end of the performance, the reviewer made a few jottings, which the next day she rewrote:

Compare with last year's Midsummer Night's Dream

Set: barren;

pipe framework at rear. Duncan exits on it.

Useful?

witches: powerful, not funny

stage: battlefield? barren land?

costume: earth-colored rags

they seduce–even caress–Mac.

Macbeth

~~witches caress him?~~

strong; also gentle (with Lady M)

Lady Macb.

sexy in speech about unsexing her

too attractive? Prob. ok

Banquo's ghost: naturalistic, covered with blood

Duncan: terrible; worst actor except for Lady Macduff's boy

costumes: leather, metal; only Duncan in robes

pipe framework used for D, and murder of Lady Macduff

set

forest: branches unrealistic; stylized? or cheesy?

The Finished Version The published review follows, accompanied by some marginal notes in which we comment on its strengths.

Sandra Santiago

An Effective Macbeth

Title conveys information about thesis.

Macbeth at the University Theater is a thoughtful and occasionally exciting production, partly because

Opening paragraph is informative, letting the reader know the reviewer's overall attitude.

the director, Mark Urice, has trusted Shakespeare and has not imposed a gimmick on the play. The characters do not wear cowboy costumes as they did in last year's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Probably the chief problem confronting a director of Macbeth is how to present the witches so that they are powerful supernatural forces and not silly things that look as though they came from a Halloween party. Urice gives us ugly but not absurdly grotesque witches, and he introduces them most effectively. The

Reviewer promptly turns to a major issue.

stage seems to be a bombed-out battlefield littered with rocks and great chunks of earth, but some of these begin to stir—the earth seems to come alive—and the clods move, unfold, and become the witches, dressed in brown and dark gray rags. The suggestion is that the witches are a part of nature, elemental forces that can hardly be escaped. This effect is increased by the moans and creaking noises that they make, all of which could be comic but which in this production are impressive.

First sentence, by means of "further," provides an effective transition.

The witches' power over Macbeth is further emphasized by their actions. When the witches first meet Macbeth, they encircle him, touch him, caress him, even embrace him, and he seems helpless, almost their plaything. Moreover, in the scene in which he imagines that he sees a dagger, the director has arranged for one of the witches to appear, stand near Macbeth, and guide

his hand toward the invisible dagger. This is, of course, not in the text, but the interpretation is reasonable rather than intrusive. Finally, near the end of the play, just before Macduff kills Macbeth, a witch appears and laughs at Macbeth as Macduff explains that he was not "born of woman." There is no doubt that throughout the tragedy Macbeth has been a puppet of the witches.

Paragraph begins with a broad assertion and then offers supporting details.

Macbeth (Stephen Beers) and Lady Macbeth (Tina Peters) are excellent. Beers is sufficiently brawny to be convincing as a battlefield hero, but he also speaks the lines sensitively, and so the audience feels that in addition to being a hero he is a man of insight and imagination, and even a man of gentleness. One can believe Lady Macbeth when she says that she fears he is "too

Reference to a particular scene.

full of the milk of human kindness" to murder Duncan. Lady Macbeth is especially effective in the scene in which she asks the spirits to "unsex her." During this speech she is reclining on a bed and as she delivers the lines she becomes increasingly sexual in her bodily motions, deriving excitement from her own stimulating words. Her attachment to Macbeth is strongly sexual, and so, too, is his attraction to her. The scene when she persuades him to kill Duncan ends with them passionately embracing. The strong attraction of each for the other, so evident in the early part of the play, disappears after the murder, when Macbeth keeps his distance from Lady Macbeth and does not allow her to

touch him. The acting of the other performers is effective, except for Duncan (John Berens), who recites the lines mechanically and seems not to take much account of their meaning.

Description, but also analysis.

The set consists of a barren plot at the rear of which stands a spidery framework of piping, of the sort used by construction companies, supporting a catwalk. This framework fits with the costumes (lots of armor, leather, heavy boots), suggesting a sort of elemental, primitive, and somewhat sadistic world. The catwalk, though effectively used when Macbeth goes off to murder Duncan (whose room is presumably upstairs and offstage) is not much used in later scenes. For the most part it is an interesting piece of scenery, but it is not otherwise helpful. For instance, there is no reason why the scene with Macduff's wife and children is staged on it. The costumes are not in any way Scottish—no plaids—but in several scenes the sound of a bagpipe is heard, adding another weird or primitive tone to the production.

Concrete details.

Concrete details to support evaluation.

Summary.

This Macbeth appeals to the eye, the ear, and the mind. The director has given us a unified production that makes sense and that is faithful to the spirit of Shakespeare's play.

[New page]

Documentation.

Work Cited

Macbeth. By William Shakespeare. Dir. Mark Urice. With Stephen Beers, Tina Peters, and John Berens. University Theater, Medford, Mass. 3 Mar. 2004.

The marginal notes call attention to certain qualities in the review, but three additional points should be made:

1. The reviewer's feelings and evaluations are clearly stated, not in such expressions as "furthermore I feel," and "it is also my opinion," but in such expressions as "a thoughtful and occasionally exciting production," "excellent," and "appeals to the eye, the ear, and the mind."
2. The evaluations are supported by details. For instance, the evaluation that the witches are effectively presented is supported by a brief description of their appearance.
3. The reviewer is courteous, even when (as in the discussion of the catwalk, in the next-to-last paragraph) she is talking about aspects of the production she doesn't care for.