Practical criticism of representative short stories taught in Montana high schools

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PRACTICAL CRITICISM

of

REPRESENTATIVE SHORT STORIES

TAUGHT IN MONTANA HIGH SCHOOLS

by

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INTRODUCTION

When one undertakes a thesis, he is so often discouraged that he wonders if it is worth the effort, but a push and a push there helps the writer over the rough spots.

To my adviser, Dr. Agnes V. Bonar, of the Fontana State University English Department I am exceedingly grateful for her help and encouragement. When things seemed to be dark and the weight too heavy to bear, her help and suggestions broke through the low-hanging clouds.

To Dr. Seymour Betsey, also of the English Department, I am also grateful for his help and suggestions. He has opened my eyes to criticism of literature and I shall never take any piece for granted. He has helped me understand the motive and purpose of the author, and how successfully he has done the job.

Last, but no means least, I owe a debt to my wife, whose help in the typing of the many copies has been greatly appreciated. But more than her help in typing, has been her determination that this thesis would be finished. I am indeed grateful that such a wife stood behind me to give me the encouragement that I needed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Prevailing Attitudes in the Teaching of Literature

Anyone who has read The English Journal and other professional magazines is aware of the concern of teachers over the reaction of their pupils to literature. The study of literature, which should be one of the most fascinating in the high school, is often considered by the pupils to be boring, difficult and useless. Worried about their students' attitude, teachers sometimes lose confidence not only in their teaching procedures, but in the course itself.

However, there is no lack of advice and suggestions. The National Council of Teachers of English, the undisputed leader in the teaching field, publishes The English Journal and Elementary English, two magazines which supply the teacher with information and practical help. Besides the magazines, there are three full-length books published by the Council and a half dozen or more text books on methods of teaching English, which are used by college classes for prospective teachers.

Even though the soundness and validity of their ideas
may be open to criticism, the authors of these text books
are consulted eagerly by thousands of teachers and have be-
come, practically speaking, leaders and "authorities" in the
field. In answer to the question, "why teach literature to
children?" the authors are in considerable agreement. Using
slightly different phrases, most of them emphasize that lit-
erature should be selected to "meet the needs of youth and
promote growth." In other words, literature should do its
share in the general education of boys and girls.

According to these authors, literature educates in
several ways. Of all subjects in school, they argue, litera-
ture is most productive of ideas. J. N. Hook puts it this
way:

The immature reader—whether he is eight or
eighty—gets little besides entertainment and
escape from fiction. But the thoughtful,
nature reader finds in fiction partial answers
to age-old questions: what is good and what is
evil? Is life purposeless? Are people merely
accidental excrescences on a planet that is out
on atom in the universe? Is there a creating,
controlling power? If so, is He antagonistic,
indifferent, or benevolent? since no author
is omniscient, the reader knows that he will
never find complete answers to his metaphysical
queries. But he knows also that from clues
here and there he can piece together a phil-
osophy of life which will serve him, or that he
can amend his existing philosophy.

2. Ibid., p. 124.

3. J. N. Hook, The Reaching of High School Students,
Besides opening the students' minds to ideas, literature, so these authorities say, provides vicarious experience through which the readers acquire a great deal of miscellaneous information. DeBoer, Kaufler, and Miller say:

"We can experience through books what we cannot do ourselves—experimenting in laboratories, discovering new lands, living in different countries, building bridges, working on farms, and living in large cities."  

Through these vicarious experiences, the student is helped "to understand society,"5 and "to see in a magic glass times that are past."6 Through his reading of poetry and fiction, a pupil learns to understand the needs and aspirations of others and can find in literature help in solving his personal problems.7

All writers agree that literature should be a "source of pleasure."8 It should open for the reader "an avenue of

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enjoyment."\textsuperscript{9} It can and should be "a vital source of release and comfort\textsuperscript{10} and "an illuminator of the beautiful."\textsuperscript{11}

During the last few years, more and more writers are advocating the use of literature to help in the building of more discerning, enlightened citizens. Literature should give pupils "an insight into the reasons why different culture groups think, talk, dress or behave as they do... help pupils to understand the mutual interdependence of human beings in the family, community, nation and world."\textsuperscript{12}

Says Lucia Mirrielees in a widely used text:

You are state-trained teachers in a democracy to whom is entrusted the training of future citizens, and your business is so to train them that they can live intelligently in the co-operative, democratic society we hope to see emerging out of the present day.\textsuperscript{13}

I agree with these writers that literature must contribute to the general education of youth; it seems to me, however, that they do not emphasize enough the vital importance of teaching students to read a piece of literature intelligently. Unless the student learns to read analytically so that he comprehends the author's intention and the full meaning of a given selection, he cannot gain the

\textsuperscript{9} Mirrielees, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 379.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 379.
\textsuperscript{11} DeBoer, Kaulfer and Miller, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 224.
\textsuperscript{12} DeBoer, Kaulfer and Miller, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{13} Mirrielees, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 330.
educational values which comes from studying the best fiction; nor can he learn to separate good literature from the chaff.

The "study helps" in anthologies for secondary schools, although there are notable exceptions, lead a reader to consider only the surface meanings, and do not guide him into the inductive method which leads to comprehension.

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to devise, as a guide for the teacher, a plan or method of analyzing a short selection of prose fiction of the kind usually taught in high school. To choose the particular short stories for this purpose, I surveyed the anthologies of American literature published by Harcourt Brace, Ginn, Scott Foresman, Laidlow, Holt, Iroquois, and The American Book Company. The following short stories were most often included:

- The Devil and Daniel Webster.................6
- The Purloined Letter..........................3
- The Ransom of Red Chief.....................3
- Sixteen........................................3
- Dr. Heidegger's Experiment..................3
- The outcasts of poker flat...................2
- Flight..........................................2
- The most dangerous game.....................2
- Rip Van Winkle...............................2

From this list, five were chosen as representatives of different kinds of stories: "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," an allegory with a meaning not apparent to high school students unless they study it carefully; "The Purloined Letter,"
one of the few detective stories found in high school anthologies; "Sixteen," the slick-magazine type of story which appeals to high school students because of its familiarity; "The Outcasts of poker Flat," a western story emphasizing local color and having an unrealistic ending; and "Flight," a realistic, well-written story of the reaction of simple people to complexities of life they do not understand.
CHAPTER II

THE METHOD OF ANALYZING A STORY AS USED IN THIS STUDY

Before a teacher can "teach" a story, i.e., help the students to read it intelligently, he must understand the story thoroughly himself and recognize its strengths and weaknesses. Only after analyzing it carefully, is he able to ask questions which guide the reading of the students.

After studying the five stories presented in this thesis, I concluded that there is no set formula for analyzing stories that can be universally applied, nor any outline which can be followed in every selection.

According to Brooks and Warren, a student has threshold interests in reading fiction and dwells on what he knows and likes in real life. It is the duty of the teacher to supplement these threshold interests of the student by showing him that his liking for a story "depends, in one sense at least, upon total structure, upon the logic of the whole, the relationships existing among elements of character and psychology, action, social situations, ideas and attitudes, style, and so on."\(^\text{14}\) The impulse to dwell on the known world and the impulse to enlarge experience through fiction are admirable, but are pernicious only when they

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operate in isolation and stop at the level of the threshold interest. The student can best be brought to an appreciation of the more broadly human values in fiction by studying the story, using a close analytical and interpretive reading of concrete examples.

In applying this method, the teacher first helps the student to understand that when an author writes a story he is entirely free to create whatever characters-in-relationship he wishes and place them in whatever setting he desires. Moreover, he is free to move his characters through any succession of events or situations he wishes: this is commonly called the "plot." The first job of the student is to show his teacher that he has understood well the characters-in-relationship, the setting, and the succession of situations. Very often it happens that a student will show that he has imperfectly understood significant details here—and he will, consequently misinterpret.

Next, the student must realize that the author is free to create his world as near to, or as far from, "reality" as he chooses. Some authors take for granted that the reader understands that a realistic background is offered. Steinbeck in "Flight" gives a background of the sterile farm and the forbidding granite hills, a background that

15. Ibid., p. ix.
16. Ibid., p. x.
makes the people who farm it as sturdy as the very ground
they live upon. Daly in "Sixteen" offers what at first
seems to be a realistic life of a sixteen year old high
school student. Other authors have departed from the
realistic world because what they wish to do can be done
better this way. The author can use allegory, in which the
characters, objects, and events are not to be taken as real,
but as standing for a system of ideas, item by item. When Hawthorne "labels his stories a 'parable,' 'fantasy,'
'morality,' 'apologue,' or 'legend,' as he so often does,
he is admitting that the tales are not representations of
life. At most they are presentations of what might be
life-like." Often an author will use symbols to convey
his idea of an escape from the realistic world. A symbol
is an object, character, or incident which stands for some-
thing else, or suggests something else. In Heidegger,
Hawthorne uses a mirror as a symbol that reveals the truth
behind a delusion; the mirror reflects the old people as
they are, not in the youthful state that they think they are.

The author is free to use language, figures, and
whatever technical devices are at the disposal of any writer
of fiction. The author will adapt language to the particular

17. Ibid., p. 301.

18. Leland Schubert, Hawthorne, The Artist, Chapel

kind of character he is portraying. Poe uses a poetic
detective; Hawthorne gives a sense of the allegorical past
and a sort of magic in Heidegger; Steinbeck in "Flight"
gives a transliteration of simple people into English; and
Daly gives a popular picture of the language of high school
students. In the use of figures the author has many devices
to convey what he wants the reader to feel. He can use
symbols as Hawthorne was fond of doing. Representatives
of the animal and vegetable kingdom—a dying butterfly and
a dried rose—are rejuvenated by the water and become old
again when the water is spilled. The mirror becomes a
symbol of truth and a tomb from which could be summoned
the shapes of the past. The water symbolizes eternal life
which is offered to all people, and as they live their
lives, they either keep it pure or dirty it with their sins.
Steinbeck uses rock as a symbol to show how these simple
people have become as durable as the very land they have
tried to farm, and like the rock, the assimilation of these
people into society has been an eroding process. The knife
is used as a weapon and symbol of a primitive inheritance
found in these people; the rattlesnake a symbol of their
striking out at whatever menaces them. In "Sixteen" the
author uses a descriptive background that is found in the
popular magazines; the night is lovely and the stars are out
just for the girl.

The student ought to be aware that the writer can take
different attitudes to the characters-in-relationship he is creating. He can show simplicity of character, as does Daly in "Sixteen," and can be sucked in by his own character as Maureen Daly is. He can show complexities of characters as in Pepe who is yet a boy and yet a man. The author can be sympathetic, as is Steinbeck, who admires the people he has created. The author often shows antipathy for his characters, as does Hawthorne in his story that has been chosen.

Or an author can be objective as is Ice, who has a detached, impersonal feeling for the characters he creates.

The student ought to learn that the author creates certain characters in certain relationship in a particular setting. Any writer chooses a particular language, makes use of particular figures, and adopts particular attitudes. He chooses these and no other particularities because he wishes mostly to emphasize something, or wishes to communicate something. This is the author's "intention." And a student (or class) must collaborate with the teacher in deciding as well as they can what the author's intention is before they can do anything else. A good story has a meaning--it says something--it has significance. Harte is trying to tell the reader that there is good in the most unpromising characters.

20. Ibid., p. 286.
21. Ibid., p. 286.
literature is more than a moralization of life, and it is more than a didactic lesson. The form of the story states the theme so precisely that for an exact statement of it we must turn to the whole body of the story itself. If one wants to know the theme of "Flight," he must read the story.

After the student has noted the details as illustrated above, he is now finished with the "interpretative" aspect of reading a short story. Once the teacher and the class are agreed on what the writer has mostly tried to communicate in these terms, they are free to go ahead to the other matters. The other matters are where does the strength of the story lie, and where are the weaknesses? Often a class discussion will bring out strengths and weaknesses that a teacher has overlooked in his analysis of the story.

The chapters in this study are divided into two parts: (1) the interpretation and criticism, and (2) the significance such a story can have for high school students. The interpretation will analyze the plot; the criticism will point out the strengths and weaknesses; and the last part will show what impact such a story can make on high school students. The teaching of literature should bring books and readers together in such a way that any given selection will have meaning for the individual, and that reading will

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22. Ibid., p. 265-267.
23. Ibid., p. 267.
arouse curiosity and desire for further reading. To get the student to consider the story for the theme, to get him away from his threshold interests, is the teacher's duty.
CHAPTER III

DR. HEIDEGGER'S EXILE

by

KATHERINE HAYTHOMBE

Four aged friends of Dr. Heidegger are invited to his study to help him in an experiment. The four praised people are Mr. Nedbourne, Colonel Killigrew, Mr. Gascoigne, and Widow Bycherly. Mr. Nedbourne in the prime of his life had been a "prosperous merchant, and had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was now little better than a mendicant." Colonel Killigrew had wasted his life in excesses of food and drink, "in the pursuit of sinful pleasures, which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout, and divers other torments of soul and body." Mr. Gascoigne was a politician of "evil fame, or at least had been so, till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation, and made him obscure instead of infamous." Widow Bycherly had been a beauty in her youth, "but for a long while past, she had lived in deep seclusion, on account of certain scandalous stories, which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her." All three men were once lovers of the widow, and had been on the verge of cutting each other's throats for her love.

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The study, where the experiment is to take place, is described in such a way that the reader may decide for himself whether the miraculous change actually takes place or whether the doctor perpetrates a magician's trick on his friends. Note the effect of the italicized words. In the dim, dusty room lined with books and decorated with cobwebs, stood a bust of Hippocrates, with which, "according to some authorities the doctor held conversations about difficult cases." A mirror between two bookcases was the subject of many wonderful stories. "It was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward." A heavy folio, bound in black leather and fastened with a silver clasp was commonly "affirmed to be a book of magic. When this book was once lifted by a chambermaid, so it was reported, inanimate objects within the room reacted as though they were alive." These words make one wonder if Heidegger is a magician, an alchemist, or a doctor of medicine. Whether or not he ever made any great experiments is uncertain; Hawthorne himself adds to the readers' doubt by his choice of words.

The doctor was "a very strange old gentleman, whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories." A bachelor living alone, he spent his days attending patients and carrying on curious experiments. More than fifty years before, the doctor had been engaged
to a young lady, Sylvia Bard, who had died on the bridal evening after she had swallowed one of her lover's prescriptions; the reader is led to believe that Heidegger could have tried an experiment on Sylvia.

Before asking the cooperation of his four friends, the doctor performed an experiment for them. Taking a rose from the book of magic, he told his guests that this was the rose he was to have worn on his bosom on the night of his wedding. It was given to him by his fiancée, Sylvia Bard. When he placed the rose in a vase of water, it became fresh as the day it was picked. By insinuating that the water was obtained from the fountain of youth in the southern part of Florida Peninsula, the doctor secured the willing cooperation of the four old people in testing its youth-giving effects on the human body.

Heidegger poured his friends some of the water, warning them to think before they drank it, as "they should draw up some rules of guidance in passing the second time through the perils of youth." They should become patterns of morals and wisdom to the young people of the present generation. But the only reply they made him was a "fearful and tremulous laugh; so very ridiculous was the idea, that knowing how closely repentance treads behind the steps of error that they should ever do astrey again." With solemn hands, the four lifted the glasses to their lips and drank deeply. Their eyes grew clear and bright; their hair
became darker, and the four passed from old age to middle age.

How did the four react? The widow ran to the mirror to see the startling change. She stood there, curtseying and simpering to her own image. She placed her face close to the glass to see if some long-remembered wrinkle had vanished. In the past she had made much of her beauty and of the charm she had that attracted men. Yet awkward in her lease on life, she could not turn away from the pleasures her beauty gave her. Mr. Gascoigne's mind remained on political topics. In his early return to youth he was for the people and the people's rights, but as he became younger he reverted to his old political ideas. Colonel Milligrew sang a bottle song, a song heard in a tavern. His life had been filled with the pleasures of the flesh, and he was too steeped in sin to shake the bonds of his first life. In his new chance, he could not keep his eyes off the shapely form of the widow. The pleasures of the flesh were too ingrained to throw off. Mr. Medbourne was involved in speculation, a project so wild that it was simply ludicrous. A frantic speculator in his former life, he was not strong enough to free himself from the yoke of his former life.

As the four guests drank more water they became younger. They were in the happy prime of youth; they were a merry group of youngsters who poked fun at their old-fashioned attire and at the infirmities of old age. Obsessed
only by their being young again, the four did not pause to reflect or think about changing their lives. The only thing that mattered to them was that they were young once more.

The widow wished to dance, and asked the doctor to dance with her. Rebuffed by him, the widow was surrounded by the three men who grappled to embrace her. It was a lively picture of youthful rivalship; yet the mirror reflected the image of three old men contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrunken old lady. As they struggled to and fro, the table was overturned, and the precious water was spilled on the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly which lay dying on the floor. It revived and flew to a perch on Dr. Heidegger's head.

The doctor asked the guests to cease struggling, calling them back to the present. Sylvia's rose became faded and old; the butterfly dropped to the floor dead. The four again became old, as the power of the water faded. But they did not learn their lesson, and they vowed to take off for Florida to search for the Fountain of Youth.

This story is a sort of parable, the theme is that men, if restored to youth, would commit the same sins and follies as those he now regrets. In many ways the plot shows skillful handling. The study, about which fantastic and supernatural stories were told, is described in sufficient detail to make an appropriate setting for the unusual
experiment. Even the most skeptical reader would agree that the eccentric old doctor, who had spent more than sixty years at curious experiments which were regarded with superstitious awe by the townspeople, could easily hoax his subjects into imagining themselves in their second youth.

Symbols are used to good effect in reinforcing the theme. Representatives of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, a dried rose and a dying butterfly, are rejuvenated by the water and become old again when the water is spilled. The author suggests that it is against God's law to live life over again; all are destined to die.

As he does in many of his other stories, (e. g. The Scarlet Letter and "Feathertop") Hawthorne uses a mirror, first to add to the eerie atmosphere of the study, and again as a symbol of truth when it shows that the subjects are still in their old age. It is also a tomb from which could be summoned the shapes of the past when the images of the deceased patients of Heidegger peered out at him whenever he looked that way.

The theme of this subject is not new in literature and philosophy. Does the author give it an impressive treatment? As subjects he uses four people who represent four well known types of sinners—the dishonest merchant, the frivolous fakir, the corrupt politician, and the scandalous flirt. Because one can hardly take these oversimplified characters seriously as individual human beings, one
is not much moved by sympathy, amusement, disgust, or contempt toward them or their actions. The theme then can be intellectually perceived but not emotionally felt.

Hawthorne intends that the theme be universally applied. The wise Dr. Heidegger says after the "water of youth" is lost, "well—I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to wet my very lips in it--no, though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me!"

If one reflects on the parade, one cannot help but raise certain questions. Why does the author believe that man would not change any portion of his life if he could live it again? Does man lack will power? Does he lack ability to learn from experience? Is his life fore-ordained? One can only deduce the answers from what the author does not say. Man's will power is not involved in this story because the subjects make no resolves to reform and put up no struggle to do so. Their rejuvenation period was so short that there was no time for sober second thoughts which might come after an initial celebration period. One can only conclude that the theme is demonstrating a sort of predestination in which man's actions are fore-ordained by divine will, by environment, by heredity, or by combinations of influences.

Hawthorne's irony is two-fold in this story. First, why should these four be chosen for such a test? They are
extreme types, and their sins are too deeply ingrained to remove so that they are unable to change their lives. Hawthorne could have chosen four philanthropic humans, but his belief is that any four who were chosen would live the same life anew. This is shown by Heidegger's refusal to partake in the experiment and his learning the truth from the actions of the four friends.

The second ironic touch of the author is poking fun at the Gothic devices in vogue at the time. The Gothic novel, according to Thrall and Hibbard, is a form in which magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics. Doubleday states,

"Of all the tales, 'Dr. Heidegger's Experiment,' in its apparent simplicity reveals most clearly Hawthorne's attitude toward his Gothic materials. These materials are entirely conventional; the attitude toward them is peculiarly fresh. In a single paragraph, just after the doctor has welcomed his friends to his study, Hawthorne crops in and heaps together a welter of Gothic properties and devices—this one room indeed, has enough Gothic paraphernalia for all the romances Jane Austen's Catherine Morland ever read. There is in this catalogue of the Gothic romancers stock in trade, a delicate satire on the very convention Hawthorne is using. Yet 'Dr. Heidegger's Experiment' is not primarily satire; it has an intent as a parable. The touch of satire is a sign to the reader to accept the tale as allegory—a way of restraining one kind of interest in the

action so that another kind may emerge. 25

One may question why Hawthorne gives very few details of the backgrounds of the four people who drink the waters. The author is interested only in the experiment. Leland Schubert makes this point:

In the beginning paragraphs the stage is set, the properties are arranged, and the mood is established...the story deals only with the experiment, not what went before or what followed in the lives of the characters. It sets the spirit of the story by stressing the fantastic and curious aspect of Dr. Heidegger as well as of the room in which the experiment is to take place. 26

Hawthorne is not interested in why these are types they are, but only in the experiment that is to follow and in the moral he has to tell. W. C. Brownell complains "that none of Hawthorne's persons has enough features for an individual or enough representative traits for a type. Instead they symbolize ideas or conditions of men. They are allegorical emodiments rather than figures combined and drawn from observation." 27 This lack of fleshy qualities of the characters is not a weakness in the story, but


rather a strength as the author is using them for symbolic reasons.

Yet the basic strength of the story is also its weakness. Hawthorne carefully selects four people who are so at the mercy of their vices, that the reader might legitimately question whether the experiment would have been had he chosen other people. The selection of four good people would have the same result, but this choice would have made Hawthorne's task much more difficult.

PART II

At least one story of Hawthorne should be in every anthology of American literature for the junior or senior classes. His use of symbols in working out his allegories compel the literal minded students who read for plot only to read more carefully and to think more closely about the author's meaning. The student accustomed to reading realistic or romantic fiction finds in a Hawthorne story characters used primarily as puppets, whose actions illustrate a truth or moral.

Also a study of Hawthorne can be an introduction to symbols. For example, he adorned his imagined rooms and landscapes with mirrors of every size and nature, with pots, fountains, lakes, pools, anything that could reflect the human form. Mirrors and other functions in his stories; sometimes they were tombs from which could be
summoned the shapes of the past (as in "Old Esther Dudley"); sometimes they prophesied the future (as in *The House of Seven Gables*); often they revealed the truth behind a delusion (as in "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment"); and often they were a kind of window or doorway into the spiritual world. The symbols used by Hawthorne are more obvious than the symbols of our modern day writers who tend more to impressionism. In "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" the symbolism is more easily understood than that found in Katherine Ann Porter's "The Flowering Judas," for example.

As an introduction to Hawthorne, there are better examples than "Dr. Heidegger's experiment." Much more successful is "Young Goodman Brown" with its theme of the pollution of sin in the hearts of those who parade as just and pure before society. The irony in "The Ambitious Guest" is as good as any to be found in American literature; its nameless hero telling in a mountain inn his dream of earthly immortality, while his doom already trembles above him in the impending avalanche. Another replacement of "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" could be "The Birthmark," with its idea of the struggle between man's ceaseless aspirations toward perfection, and the inherent, cureless imperfection of his nature.

Any one of the stories suggested above would also be more interesting to students than "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment." To high school people, a person in his late
The twenties is old, and to them the characters of the story are too old and too vague to be worth considering. The desire to return to youth is not important to those who have youth in their grasp. Of all Hawthorne's stories, "Festhertop," the story of the straw-stuffed scarecrow with the pumpkin head who passed as a man when he went to town, is the most fascinating; but the theme of disillusionment is not completely comprehended by a high school student.

However, if "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" is the only Hawthorne story in the one anthology available, it can be taught fairly successfully if the teacher himself completely understands the story and directs the attention of his students to the theme and the allegory.
CHAPTER IV

THE FORMJOINS LETTER

by

EDGAR ALLAN POE

In this story the author presents the crux at the start and then unravels it. There must be in the presented situation the clues that are used to solve the mystery so that the reader can look back from the solved riddle, and see that he as well as the author had the basis for the hypothesis. It is not in the mystery itself that the author seeks to interest the reader, but rather in the successive steps whereby his analytical observer is enabled to solve a problem that might well be dismissed as beyond human comprehension. The emotion aroused is not mere surprise; it is recognition of the unsuspected capabilities of the human brain; it is admiration for the analytic acumen capable of working out an acceptable answer to the puzzle propounded.

The problem is told through the words of the prefect of the Paris police. A lady of the court receives a personal letter from an unknown writer (at least, he is unknown to the reader). Because of the power of blackmail it would give to whoever possesses it, the letter must not
fall into wrong hands. As she reads the letter, she is interrupted by the entrance of a person who must not see the letter. Unable to hide the letter, she leaves it upon the table. At this juncture, Minister D_____ enters; "his lynx eye immediately perceives the letter, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the person addressed, and fathoms her secret." He produces a letter somewhat like her letter in question, pretends to read it, and places it close to her letter on the table. When he leaves, he takes her letter with him, leaving his lying there. She dares not call out, because of the presence of the first visitor from whom she must conceal the contents of the letter.

Now that the letter is gone, she must have it back at any cost. She calls upon the prefect of the Paris police for aid, and swears him to secrecy. The police search the living quarters of the minister, but no letter is found. The minister is waylaid several times, and no letter is carried upon his person. Saffled, the prefect turns to his friend, Dupin for help.

What are the characters like as posed by the author? Minister D_____ has an intellect similar to the card or chess player who is able to anticipate the other's move. He "dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man." "He is not a fool and must have anticipated the waylayings as a matter of course." Dupin knows
him as a courtier and a "bold intriguant." He is aware of the ordinary police methods and knows of the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home are only ruses. He foresees the waylayings of the police. (He uses the letter for political purposes and deposits the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world thereby preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it). To be able to use the letter, he must always have it at hand, and to outwit the Prefect he leaves it in full view.

Baffled by the minister's tactics, the Prefect calls upon the most important person in the story, C. Auguste Dupin, who appears in two of Poe's earlier stories, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "The Murder of Marie Roget." Poe takes it for granted that the reader has read these stories as he gives no background or details of Dupin. A look at "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," shows that Dupin is young, of a wealthy family that has lost everything and now lives in poverty and that his only luxury is books.

Dupin also has the chess player's intellect and is able to anticipate the opponent's next move. He is fond of smoking and meditating in the dark. He is able to place himself in the other person's shoes and take the appropriate steps to outwit his opponent. His intellect is a detective-like form of intellect, much as a poker player acquires by studying the various actions of his opponent as
he plays his cards. The better detective wins because he is able to place himself in the criminal's mind.

Another person the reader meets is the narrator. He is a foil of Dupin and is amazed at the workings of Dupin's mind. He carries the story forward by asking the questions and letting Dupin give the answers. He is a Watson to a Holmes, yet Poe wrote this story forty-six years before Doyle created his two characters. He lives with Dupin and is the common reader. He is the in-between figure capable of going beyond the Prefect and incapable of going beyond Dupin. Since Dupin must think and explain, the narrator is created to keep the plot moving and connected.

Poe shows both mild contempt and admiration for the police methods. Dupin is Poe's idea of the better detective, yet he gives the reader a very detailed description of the thoroughness of the Paris police. It is the preview of the modern scientific methods that are to come, such as the plaster casts, fingerprints, ballistic tests, blood smears, and the like. The Prefect is able to deal with the ordinary criminal mind; he is unable to place himself in the criminal's boots. Poe tells the reader that the Prefect's methods are sufficient in ordinary criminal cases; but the minister is not an ordinary criminal, and the Prefect is not able to cope with this fact.

Now that the characters are created and placed in the reader's mind, the reader sees that Dupin's problem is
thethreefold: one, Dupin must discover a method which the
prefect is incapable of imagining; two, he must devise a
method to recover the letter; and three, not only must the
letter be recovered, but the minister, until he needs it,
must not know it is recovered.

Thus Dupin reasons that the minister had left the
letter in plain view. Knowing the house has been diligently
searched by the police, Dupin concludes that the minister
would leave it so as he must have it readily available.
Such an idea does not occur to the prefect, who reasons that
because he is unable to find it after his many searches, it
could not be on the premises.

To carry out his second method, Dupin visits the min-
ister. Wearing green glasses and declaring he has weak eyes,
Dupin is able to scrutinize the room, while seemingly intent
only upon the conversation of his host. At length, his
eyes fall upon a trumpey filigree cardrack of pasteboard
that hangs from a brass knob just beneath the middle of the
mantelpiece. In this rack are five or six cards and a sol-
itary letter, the latter much soiled and crumpled. Dupin
comes to the conclusion that this is the letter.

But how to recover it? Dupin leaves his snuffbox as
an excuse to make a return visit. The next morning Dupin
returns. While visiting, Dupin and the minister are inter-
rupted by the sound of a shot and fearful screams coming
from the street below. Minister D____ runs to the window
to see the commotion, and while he is there, Dupin secures
the letter and places a substitute in its place. The man
who started the commotion is in the employ of Dupin. Dupin
leaves, and the minister is none the wiser that the letter
has been recovered. The letter is now returned to the
Prefect, who pays Dupin fifty thousand francs for the re-
covery. Dupin is able to solve the crime because he is the
better detective; and since the minister does not know
that Dupin is his opponent, the latter is able to gain en-
trance to the house and to secure the letter.

 Poe is describing the solution of a crime by pure
reasoning. If one is to solve a detective problem, accord-
ing to Poe, he must be able to identify his intellect with
that of his opponent, and to measure his opponent's intel-
lect accurately. A successful detective is able to ident-
ify himself with the mental scheming of his opponent, and
Dupin successfully does just this. Because Poe's interest
is only in the problem posed, the characters are not deeply
depicted.

Part of the strength of the story lies in its action.
Although the setting never moves from Dupin's chambers, the
story has the action of the theft, the action of the minis-
ter's use of the letter, the action of the Prefect's search,
and the action of Dupin's recovery of the letter. All this
action is implied, and this gives the story its greatest
strength.
More strength of the story lies in Poe's ability to keep the hiding place from the reader until near the end of the story, in his picture of the thoroughness of the Paris police, and in depicting how a chess player's intellect works in solving a problem by anticipating the workings of his adversary's mind.

But the weaknesses of the story are also present. Poe does not describe the intellect ascribed to Dupin and the minister; the reader must do this. "As a poet and mathematician," according to Dupin, the minister "would reason well." Poe does not define these terms. Dupin is a poet who dabbles in doggerel. The minister is also of this type as Dupin scornfully calls him a poet. Poe's use of long discoursive paragraphs and conversations tend to make the reader lose sight of the importance of the letter. Who wrote the letter is not known, nor is the relation between the court lady and the highly exalted personage who must not see the letter divulged to the reader. How the minister uses the power the letter gives him is also withheld from the reader.

PART II

"The Purloined Letter" by Edgar Allan Poe is a poor detective story for high school students. It lacks suspense, and the student is not too much interested in the chess-like solution. The characters lack flesh and blood;
the main character, Dupin, has no curiosity about the contents of the letter. And the reader, who is curious about the contents, never does learn what the letter contains. The long paragraphs make the high school student skip over them, and he is bored by Poe's lengthy discourse on logic and algebra. The student does not know what Poe means by a poet and mathematician, nor does he get any clue from the story.

"The Purloined Letter" starts out in an unusual way; the thief is known. The importance of the letter is stressed, but the reason why the woman wishes to conceal the letter, and the relation between the woman and the man who must not see the letter are never divulged. The reader can marvel at the meticulous search of the minister's house by the police, and the student can be shown how the various police methods have evolved since Poe's time. However, to have him believe that after such a deep, probing search that the letter is in plain sight, although disguised, is a little too much for the student's credibility. A very thorough search would reveal the letter because the police prefect and his men would have looked at all papers in the room whether they were disguised or not.

The student is better acquainted with Poe's horror stories. "The Black Cat," with the cat revealing the hiding place of the wife's body, is better received by the student. "The Tell Tale Heart" makes readers shudder as they dismember
the body with the narrator. The detective story, however, does not quite come off. It would be better to replace this story with the modern detective story, with its suspense building up in every sequence. A detective story relating why a man would commit a crime, a story that probes into a criminal's mind, or a story that has sociological meaning would be better fare for the student than this story with its trivial problem of a hidden letter. Two detective stories that could be substituted are "Miss Hinck" by Henry Meydor Harrison, which gives the prolonged chase of detective and criminal, the reader being uncertain which is which, and "The Open Window" by Charles Loebe, which presents an intriguing problem of a hunchback who works on the mind of his victim until the victim becomes crazy because of his fear of poisoning.
CHAPTER V

FLIGHT

by

JOHN STEINBECK

Near Monterey on the wild coast, the Torres family had its small, unproductive farm, located on a sterile slope that dropped to the sea. The farm buildings huddled like aphids on the mountain skirts. The shack and the rotten barn were "gray-bitten" with "sea salt, beaten by the wind until they had become granite colored like the hills. A little corn grew on the sterile land, but it was stunted and grew thick only under the wind and on the landward side of the stalk." Two horses, a cow and a calf, six pigs, and a flock of lean chickens comprised the stock.

Mama Torres was "a lean dry woman with ancient eyes"—eyes which had the stoicism of many generations of Indian blood behind them. Courageous and forceful, she had ruled her family for ten years ever since her husband had died from a rattlesnake bite on his chest. (She was honest, courageous, resigned to her lot, yet not complaining). She professed the faith of Roman Catholicism, but she seems to take only the part that suited her primitive heritage. She was superstitious and fearful of the black men, yet she
gave Pepe money to burn candles in memory of her departed husband. She had three children: Pepe, nineteen; Emilio, twelve; and Rosy, fourteen.

Pepe, the main character, was tall, gentle, and affectionate. He had "a tall head, pointed at the top, and from its peak coarse black hair grew down like a thatch all around." He had sharp cheekbones and eagle nose, which were tokens of his Indian blood. His mouth was "sweet and shapely as a girl's mouth, and his chin was fragile and chisled." These features were probably inherited from his father's Spanish blood. He "was loose and gangly, and very lazy, but Mama thought he was fine and very brave, yet she never let him know this." Pepe was feeling for his manhood, wondering whether it would ever come. He had a love of colors and beautiful pictures and statues in church, but he forgot what the services symbolized. His greatest treasure was a knife left to him by his father, another sign of the savage tradition found in these people. There was a gun in the house, a weapon of modern men, but his inheritance was a knife, a weapon a primitive man could put his trust in. Whenever he pressed the button on the handle, the blade would shoot out, ready for action. For hours Pepe would practice with the knife, throwing it at a redwood post, testing his accuracy at hitting a target.

Mama Torres wanted Pepe to go to Monterey alone to get medicine and salt for the family. Wearing the colorful
hatband and the green silk handkerchief, he left for the city, fifteen miles away. When he arrived at Monterey, he went to the home of the Rodriguez family. There in the kitchen, a quarrel began, and Repé's knife was out before he realized it. A man was killed, and Repé had to flee. Returning home he told Mama Torres of what had happened, and preparations were made for his flight into the hills.

Repé fled into the rocky granite hills. Fleeing from his pursuers, he was wounded by a sliver of granite which had pierced his hand. His horse was shot from beneath him, and Repé was forced to flee on foot. Higher and higher into the unfriendly rocky hills he went, until he could go no farther. Tired and spent, he realized he could no longer escape, and presenting his body to be shot by his pursuers, he was fatally wounded in his chest. He rolled over and over again down the hill until his head was covered by an avalanche of rocks. This is the simple plot of the story, yet the plot is only incidental to this story.

The theme of this story deals with the reaction of these Spanish-Indian people when they come into contact with the laws and mores of white society. The author is not concerned with injustice, with exploitation, or with social criticism. He gives a sympathetic treatment of simple people, who face adversity with which they cannot cope with courage and strength. He pictures them as having a basic strength and courage that the so-called civilized people no
longer possess. Yet these people are not inadequate. Having a distrust of the law, of schools, they put their faith in their ability to exist by themselves, capable of overcoming many adversities.

The theme is well worked out. Here is a family on the fringe of civilization, living simple, primitive lives. The children go to school where they come in contact with modern life, but they are kept out when the truant officer is in another part of the country. One kind of medicine—the reader is not told what it is—serves for all bodily ills, and they are not in habit of consulting a doctor. When Papa Torres fell on a rattlesnake and died, the family believed that "when one is bitten in the chest there is not much that can be done." Nominaly Christians, their lives are influenced less by Christianity than by superstition and the ancient beliefs of their ancestors. Although they go to church to pray and to burn candles for the deceased father, they do not turn to prayer or to the church for comfort in their great trial. They are superstitiously fearful and respectful of the "dark watching men," who they believe inhabit the forest and will do harm to anyone curious about them.

A fatalistic viewpoint inherited from their ancestors is part of their primitive philosophy. "These things are," says Kama Torres referring to toothache and stomach disorder about which she knows neither prevention or cure.
When Pepe tells her of his crime, she sends him on his way believing that nothing can be done to save him.

Pepe, although he is lazy and childish, is old enough to be a man. He happily accepts his responsibility when he is sent to town to get the medicien and salt and is allowed to wear his father's hatband and handkerchief, symbols to him of manhood. Mama says wisely, "A boy gets to be a man when a man is needed." During the quarrel when Pepe is insulted, he responds without thinking, the way his savage ancestors would have done, and the knife leaped and killed his antagonist.

Like his savage ancestors, also, his only thought was flight. Not a part of the dominating society, he did not submit himself to its judgment nor seek its protection. Undoubtedly he could have claimed self-defense because the other man had started toward him. As ignorant and fearful of the law as Pepe was, his mother sent him off to what she was sure was certain death. Her innate sense of honor told her it would be worse to wait and "be caught like a chicken."

Pepe fled into the mountains from which there was no escape, battling brush, rock, heat, thirst, and exhaustion. Finally suffering from blood poisoning, pursued by unknown men, and seeing nothing ahead of him but solid rock, Pepe takes the honorable way out. Making the sign of the cross—the Christian symbol—on his breast, he takes the
un-Christian, but according to his own code, the honorable
way out and presents himself to his pursuers to be killed.

The writer uses symbols so skillfully that they are
almost unnoticed by the reader. Pepe's pursuers, sym­
bolize the relentless force of a civilized society which
 crushes out the people who will not keep up with its ad­
vances. To the Torres family, conflict with the law of a
society of which they are not a part is as fatal as a
rattlesnake bite. Pepe's pursuers are to him as dangerous,
powerful, and evil as the black men of the forest.

Another symbol is color. Everything on the outside
of the farm was colorless, blended into the granite-like
hills. Color to the family was a passion. They had a
red cow and a red calf; there were multicolored hens in the
farmyard. These were colored things the family could af­
ford, and also were the necessary things on the farm. Pepe
wished to wear the hatband and a silk green handkerchief
when he made his way to Monterey. The beauty of the colors
in the church fascinated Pepe, making his mind wander from
the real function of the services. The brightness of the
burning candles also held him spellbound; Garcia Torres warned
him that it "was not good devotion to stare at the pretty
things." The church offered the family the only opportunity
to see beautifully colored pictures and statues; it was one
of their few contacts with culture.

Strength is also felt in the author's symbolic use
of rocks, which become virtual characters of the story. The granite hills dominate the farm, and the sea crashes below on the rocky reefs. "Small round stones on the bottom were as brown as rust with sun moss." Papa Torres stumbled on a stone in the rocky, sterile field, falling on a rattlesnake with fatal results. "Repé's flight was into the granite hills. "Gradually the sharp snaggled edge of the ridge stood out above the rotten granite tortured and eaten by the winds of time." Repé was wounded in the hand by a granite sliver broken off by the bullet hitting the rock that Repé huddled behind for protection. To ease his pain when his arm was aching and swollen by the poison coursing in his veins, Repé "picked up a sharp blade of stone and scraped at the wound, sawed at the proud flesh and then squeezed the green juice out in big drops." When he could go no farther, he stood up on a large granite rock, presenting an inviting target. Fatally wounded, Repé rolled down the rocky slope, starting an avalanche that covered his head. The reader may wonder if Steinbeck is using this as a symbol of the church, as Jesus told Peter, "Upon this rock, I shall build my church," but Repé's faith was not based on the tenets of the church; he took only what satisfied his primitive inheritance. From this impregnable rock, this hard granite, these people must try to glean a living, and how much like this rock these people are. The impacts and constant wearing of an unbearable
bleak and difficult existence have not weakened the courageous persistence of that existence. Civilization has been an eroding force, but they, like the hard rock around them, have worn little. These people have not been assimilated into the society that surrounds them.

**PART II**

This story by Steinbeck is one of the best stories the student will meet in his anthology. To the student the flight of Pepé is thrilling, and the entire story holds him spellbound until the last word. The rigors of life on this sterile farm with its rocky fields, the towering hills of granite, and the roaring surf on the rocks below the farm become vivid pictures in the minds of the students. It is a well written story, holding the interest of the fast learner and the slow learner alike.

But the student must be shown what is in this story. It is not just a story of a boy's flight. The teacher must point out to the students what the story contains and what the author's theme is. That the people are not primitive savages must be shown to young readers. The Torres family is living on the edges of civilization, yes, but they have a culture of nineteen centuries of Christianity. Primitivism suggests a picture of tribes in darkest Africa or on the islands of the South Pacific, but these people are far removed from this. Their primitivism is in a very minor
The author has no sociological axe to grind in this story. He does not become incensed over their treatment and wish for methods to ease their lot. The author admires their courage and strength; he sympathises with them, and his admiration is all the greater because he sees that the so-called civilized man has lost this inheritance from nature. He gives a sympathetic treatment of simple people, who face adversity with which they cannot cope with courage and strength. He tries to depict what is the reaction of these people when they come into conflict with the laws of white society, and he does this very successfully.

Other things to be pointed out to the student are that these people are nominally Christians and are also set by the superstitions inherent from their savage ancestry. A fatalistic viewpoint also inherited from their savage forebears is part of their primitive philosophy. "These things are," says Iria Torres. She sends Pepe on his way believing that nothing can be done to save him. Pepe's only reaction could be flight. He could not, because of his distrust, submit to the code of the dominating society that surrounded him. It must be shown that Pepe at the last takes an honorable way out, not submitting himself to be shot like a trapped animal, nor surrendering to the very law he distrusted. The symbols of the author are so skillfully done that they could easily be overlooked by the reader.
The pursuers, not identified, symbolize the relentless force of a civilized society which crushes out the people who will not keep up with its advance. Another symbol against which the Torres family struggled in vain is the hard granite rock. Rock made the farm unproductive; it helped kill the father and husband; it mortally wounded Pepe; and it made his escape impossible. Finally, the student should be made to see that Pepe has become a man, and as Nana Torres says, "A boy gets to be a man when a man is needed."

John Steinbeck's skill is greater in his short pieces than in his longer novels, with the exception of The Grapes of Wrath. The student has no trouble seeing the wrath of the boy when he finds his pony dead in the stream, in "The Red Pony." In "The Lender of the People," the student can feel pity for the old man who once led a wagon train over the hazardous western trail; he can feel boredom of the boy's parents, and can understand how the boy is the old man's only willing listener. An anthology should contain two or three selections by the same author if they are good rather than include poor ones only in order to get a variety of stories or a variety of authors.
Chapter VI

Sixteen

by

Laureen Dalé

In this story a sixteen year old girl relates an incident, which to her, is a calamity in her life. She is not a square—"I know what a girl should do and what she shouldn't. I get around. I read. I listen to the radio. And I have two older sisters. So you see, I know what the score is." The girl heads for the skating rink and whatever lies in store. She senses something important is going to happen that night—"It was all so lovely...It was snowing a little outside—quick, eager little ducklike flakes that melted as soon as they touched your hand." But there were also stars out that night. "I don't know where they came from...Or maybe the stars were in my eyes and I just kept seeing them every time I looked up into the darkness."
The skating rink was crowded, and all the skaters were revolving in one direction. "And then he came...He said, 'Mind if I skate with you?'...That's all there was to it." She had often skated with other boys, "but this was different...He was a smoothie! He was a big shot up at school and he went to all the big dances and he was the best.
dancer in town except Harold Wright, who didn't count because he'd been to college in New York for two years! Don't you see? This was different." She can't remember what they talked about. "We just skated and skated and laughed everytime we came to that rough spot and pretty soon we were laughing all the time at nothing at all. It was all so lovely." The time soon came for her to go home. "Then he sat up straight and said, 'we'd better start home.' See, that's how I know he wanted to take me home. Not because he had to but because he wanted to." On the way home they talked of many things--"a very respectable Daily Post sort of conversation." In front of her house he handed her her skates and said, "Goodnight, now, I'll call you." She couldn't sleep when she went to bed. The idea that he would call remained in her mind. But, "That was last Thursday. Tonight is Tuesday." Her heart still prays that he will call, but her mind still laughs at the thought. "Outside the night is so still, so still I think I'll go crazy, and the white snow's all dirtied and smoked into grayness..." She knows what she knew all the time that "he'll never, never call--never."

The theme of this story is the longing for romance of a sixteen year old girl. She meets a boy at the rink, and she thinks a romance will come of the meeting because this one boy is different. Because he is a "smoothie" and a "big shot" up at school, the idea of a romance is
accentuated. She wants a romance to come of this, and she
thinks a general statement, "We'd better start home," is
the desire on his part to begin a steady romance with her.

A strength of the story lies in its apparent realism. The reader gets a good picture of a girl who thinks
she is fashionable according to her standards. "I know
its smart to wear tweedish skirts and shaggy sweaters with
the sleeves pulled up and pearls and ankle socks and sad-
dle shoes that look as if they've seen the world. "And I
know that your hair should be long, almost to your shoul-
ders, and sleek as a wet seal, just a little fluffed on
the ends, and you should wear a campus hat or a dink or
else a peasant hankie if you've that sort of a face...Now,
me I never wear a hankie. It makes my face seem wide and
Slavic." She thinks she is cosmopolitan because she reads
Winchell. "You get to know what New York boy is that way
about some pineapple princess on the West Coast and what
paradise pretty is currently the prettiest, and why some-
one, eventually, will play Scarlett O'Hara. It gives you
that cosmopolitan feeling." She is not so dumb; she knows
what to order in a soda fountain--"anyone who orders a
strawberry sundae in a drugstore instead of a lemon cone
would probably be dumb enough to wear colored ankle socks
with high-heeled pumps or use evening in Paris with a
tweed suit.

An additional strength in this story is the skilful
the author has handled the language, adding strength to the romantic theme. It is the formula that spawns tens of thousands of stories found in women's magazines and now the popular dramatic fare on TV. The author builds up a successful mood for the story, and the descriptions add to it. Vividness of description is the result of expressed comparisons and figurative use of single words. "And I know that your hair should be long, almost to your shoulders, and slick as a wet seal..." "Ashes crunched like crackerjack," and "the shrill musical jabber re-echoes from a hundred human calliopes," all these show the skill of the author in describing her feelings on that night. The change in her mood after the realization comes when she knows he will not call is achieved by skillful use of language: "The telephone is sitting on the corner table with its old black face turned to the wall so I can't see its leer." "I'm just sitting here and I'm not feeling anything; because all of a sudden I know." The repetition of single words throughout the story also add to the mood of the story; "I'm really not so dumb; it's important that you understand that," and the repetition of the adjective lovely, as in the following: "It was all so lovely I ran most of the way," and "it was all so lovely when he came."

The disillusionment that follows is worse than the dream because of the indulgence she allows herself. This is a weakness in the story. She knew all the time that he
was not going to call, but she kept on dreaming that he would. The result of this "broken" romance is magnified by her wishing that he would call. Why shouldn't he? It is the American dream that love comes at first sight, and throughout all difficulties it will triumph over all in the tradition of stories found in slick magazines. Yet love does not always come in this manner, even if a sixteen year old thinks that such is the case. The author has posed a problem but has given the reader no solution. One who has read the story comes away from his reading with a feeling that the story has no ending.

Still another weakness is the boy. It is the standard sexual pattern of discovering a faceless, nameless, and mindless, but physically attractive and "popular" campus hero, American style. He lacks identity in any form. He has no name; he dances well and is considered the big catch at school. There are no qualities that identify this boy; he is only physically attractive to this girl. "Don't you see? This was different." But it is not different; it is an attraction that the girl wished, if not with this particular boy it would have been another one on that lovely night. She thinks the romance will bear fruit because he wanted to take her home.

The author takes her theme seriously, and she states: "It wasn't meant to be a short story at all, but rather, I just wanted to get the experience down on paper to relieve
the tense, hurt feelings inside of me."26 As the author was only sixteen when she wrote this story, she considered the shattered romance—at the time—a calamity. The girl and the author are taken in by the wish fulfillment dream and the indulgence in the emotions of sadness that result when the wish fulfillment dream is shattered. She knows the boy won't call, but she indulges in the idea that somehow he will call her, even by phone, and the shattered romance will be mended forever.

PART II

Girls in the junior and senior high school generally like "Sixteen," partly because they are taken in by the apparent realism. The author mentions such familiar things as ankle socks, saddle shoes, shaggy sweaters, lux-like flakes, hankies for the hair, and tweed skirts; she uses high school slang—"smoothy," "big shot," "square," "I get around," etc.; and she mentions such well known people as Walter Winchell and Emily Post.

The girl readers also understand the disappointment of the heroine and sympathize with her. A great many adolescent girls, hoping for the "great romance" of the slick-magazine stories, have had experiences similar to that of

the girl in the story and think, "Here is an author who knows what she is talking about."

What makes the story really harmful is that the author herself, sixteen years old when she wrote the story, takes the theme seriously. The event, as she sees it, is one of life's tragedies which will leave a permanent scar. In no way does she help her readers to see that the event is an incident in the process of growing up, and that the real world is not like that presented by the love stories of the popular magazines and the television dramas.

There are many stories of superior literary value about teen-aged people. A story also named "Sixteen," by Jessamyn West, has a setting and atmosphere as familiar to the student as that of the Daily story but has considerably more substance. The heroine, called home from school because her grandfather is dying, is reluctant to leave her boy-friend and her pleasures. Persuaded by her friends to go, she attains a more realistic perspective of life as she sits by the bedside of her grandfather. Another excellent story by the same author, dealing realistically with a love affair of teen-aged people, is "Lead Her Like a Pigeon."

Other fine stories, which can be substituted for the Daily story, are Saroyan's "The Pheasant Hunter," Steinbeck's "The Red Pony," and Jesse Stuart's "The Slip-Over Sweater," all of which can be used within a course in literature.
CHAPTER VII

THE OUTCASTS OF POKER FLAT

by

BUST HANIE

The town of Poker Flat was undergoing a moral change this November of 1850. Two men were hanged from a sycamore in the gulch and temporary banishment was forced upon other objectionable characters. A body of armed men accompanied the outcasts to the town's border: John Oakhurst, a gambler; Mother Shipton and the Duchess, prostitutes; and Uncle Billy, a drunkard and suspected sluice robber. Told never to return upon pain of death, the four started on their way to the settlement of Sandy Bar, which lay over a steep mountain range of the Sierras. Oakhurst also remained silent as the escort party left them. Mother Shipton desired to cut someone's heart out; the Duchess threatened to die on the trail; and Uncle Billy cursed as he rode forward. The party was not drawn into any closer sympathy by Oakhurst's changing his horse for the sorry mule that the Duchess rode.

The party came to a wooded amphitheater, a good spot to camp had camping been the wisest thing to do. Half the journey to Sandy Bar had been completed, and the danger...
of snow in the high altitude was imminent. Furnished with drink, the party was unable to go any farther. Uncle Silly was in a stupor; the Duchess became maudlin; and Mother Shipton snored. Only Oakhurst remained erect, calmly surveying the drunken group.

Here is where Harte gives the reader some details of Oakhurst's background. Oakhurst was a pariah, lonely because of his profession. "His habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him." He must have been an honest gambler, since those who had won from him were able to prevail upon the mob not to hang him. Here is where the idea of Oakhurst's conversion begins to take place in the reader's mind. "The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him." He felt gloomy, "yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity for which he was notorious. Suddenly he heard someone call his name."

Down the trail came Tom Simpson, a guileless youth otherwise known as "The Innocent." Earlier he had lost his money to Oakhurst in a poker game. In a sudden fit of pity, Oakhurst had returned the money to the youth, together with an admonition never to play poker again, and this act had made Tom a devoted slave of Oakhurst. Simpson was without suspicion, trusting everyone he met. He was created as such an innocent character to work upon the conversions of the
three outcasts.

Tom Simson was accompanied by Finley Woods; they were on their way to Poker Flat to be married. Finley was a "stout, comely damsel of fifteen," who used to wait tables at the Temperance House. "They had been engaged a long time, but old Jane Woods had objected, and so they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were." She is also a pure and innocent character, created to work upon the conversions. The eloping pair were also too tired to continue any farther, and a camp was planned for the night.

But Oakhurst, "seldom troubled with sentiment, still less with propriety," objected, but Finley and the Innocent refused to leave. With provisions enough to last a week, the Innocent led them to a ruined cabin. During the night snow fell, covering the ground with several inches. Oakhurst "started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose." Uncle Billy was gone. Oakhurst had become suspicious of Uncle Billy, and his fears were realized when he found that the old drunkard had stolen the horses and mules, leaving the group stranded on foot. The food that was cached in the hut had escaped the thief. Oakhurst did not awaken the sleepers, and as he waited for the dawn, the realization came to him that the party was snowbound.

A careful inventory of the provisions disclosed the
fact that with care and prudence the supplies might last ten days more. Oakhurst tried to search for the trail, but he was unable to find it. As he returned he heard the sound of happy laughter echoing from the rocks. His first reaction was that the party had found the cached whiskey. This is the stage in the story at which Harte attempts to convince the reader that a conversion is beginning to take place. The evening was happily spent; the group sang hymns, accompanied by Piney playing her accordion and the Innocent playing on a pair of bone castanets.

A week passed, and Mother Shipton hoarded her food, saving it for Piney. Turning her face to the wall, she died. The body of Mother Shipton was committed to the snow, and the accordion and bones were aside they day. After the burial, Oakhurst took the Innocent aside and told him to try to make it to Poker Flat on the snowshoes that Oakhurst accompanied him as far as the canyon.

Night came, but Oakhurst did not return. The two women fed the fire with wood that had been stored by Oakhurst. In the morning they read their fate. Unable to pray, the two women embraced each other and prepared to meet their death. Two days later the rescue party found them frozen to death, locked in each other's arms.

At the foot of a pine tree, the body of Oakhurst was found, a bullet lodged in his chest, a derringer by his side. The duece of clubs was pinned to the tree with a bowie
knife, and written in pencil was Oakhurst's suicide note. He had run into a streak of bad luck and cashed in his chips. "Still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat."

The theme of this story, according to Brooks and Warren, "is that decency, sensitivity, and goodness may appear in the most unpromising characters; that there is, in human nature, a basic virtue. Certainly it is a theme which is worth serious consideration, if we can judge by the poets and fiction writers who have adopted it."29 Has Harte developed it sufficiently? The author does not give enough details about the background of the characters to let the reader know them as individuals. The two prostitutes, Mother Shipton and the Duchess, were driven from the town by the moral element, a mob which escorted them from the town of Poker Flat. The age and any physical descriptions of the women are lacking, although once Harte refers to the Duchess as a young girl. John Oakhurst was a gambler, meticulous in dress and dangerous with a gun. Uncle Billy was a drunkard and sluice robber. Without details to acquaint him with the characters, the reader doubts that the conversions could take place in such a short time.

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would these women be able to convert in less than a week? To be run out of a mining camp in California in 1850, they must have been the very lowest elements of society. Sitter at the world, it does not seem likely that they would become so resigned to their fate. It would be more probable that one of the women, if not both, would have made a futile try to get away from the cabin. Their backgrounds do not tend to make them accept their fate with such resignation.

What of Oskhurst? The author has led up to Oskhurst’s conversion by relating his former acts of charity. He gave back the winnings to the Innocent; he swapped his horse for the Duchess’ sorry rule; and he gave the snowshoes to the Innocent telling him to make his escape to Poker Flat. The helplessness of the women preyed upon him, and he decided to stay with them. Yet he was a lonely man, with no attachments to any friends, and Harte only hints that he would like to have had friends. He would probably be more in character, if one can judge by his background, if he had deserted his companions and tried to save himself.

The excessive innocence of Tom Simson and Miney Woods is another weakness. Simson entered a saloon to play poker with no knowledge of the game. He did not recognize what kind of women Mother Shipton and the Duchess were, but he must have seen them in the saloon and heard men talk
about them. Finey worked in the Temperance house as a
waitress, and she must have heard the talk of the good
women of the town about the immoral element. Only fifteen
at the time of her death, she and Simson had been engaged
for a long time. Was she engaged when she was twelve?
The author created these characters for thematic reasons,
and their innocence is a form of leavening that works up-
on the outcasts, but they are too excessively innocent to
be credible.

Another weakness of the story is the poetic language
used by Harte. It is an attempt of the author to strain
for effects that the story cannot attain by its plot or
characters. For example,

"The wind lulled as if it feared to waken
them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from
the long pine boughs, flew like white-winged
crds, and settled about them as they slept.
The moon through the rifted clouds looked
down upon what had been the camp, but all
human strain, all trace of earthly travail,
was hidden beneath the spotless mantle merci-
fully flung from above."

Harte here is not using such language legitimately. He
uses it here to give a false heightening to the pathos of
the scene, and the language in which the description is
couched is "poeticized."

This description is completely
irrelevant and represents an attempt at fanciful decoration
and is another instance of the author seeking for effects
which, he seems to feel, are not adequately supported by
the situation itself. 31

Another weakness in this story is editorializing on
the part of the author—pointing out to the reader what
he should feel, nudging the reader to respond—devices which
would not be necessary if the story could make its own
case. 32 For example, Harte comments on the finding of the
two bodies by the rescue party: "You could scarcely have
told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them which was
she that sinned." Also, "beneath the snow lay he who was
at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts
of Poker Flat." To have anything pointed out to a reader,
to call his attention to what he should feel is a weakness.

PART II

Harte's stories of the west are of the type
that are the common TV fare of today. In the last reel, the
hero reforms and wins the girl after promising to travel the
straight and narrow path forever. Harte portrays the west
as an onlooker would, not as an intelligent sympathizer.
Most of Harte's stories are too theatrical, too sentimental
to be permanent. As a development in the trend to local
color is the only reason a student should read Harte, and

31. Ibid., p. 215.
32. Ibid., p. 219.
this should be a choice of the student, not something he is forced to read in an anthology.

The background of these people in "The outcasts of Poker Flat" is not completely given. Decidedly the wickedest people in Poker Flat (as judged by the committee which escorts them to the edge of town), they give the reader no clue to the reformation that is coming. That such a conversion could come in a week or more is not doubted by the student, who is satisfied by the same diet night after night on his TV set. The student does not consider the fact that our prisons are filled with persons who have not reformed nor will not. The excessive innocence of Piney Woods and Tom Simson is credible to the student; that such naive persons could scarcely have existed in such times so close to the boisterous gold rush days of California never occurs to him.

This story has an importance to the student that should not be underestimated. If the student is to develop a standard of evaluating stories, then this story could remain in the anthologies as an example of one poorly done. A few bad stories upon which the student can practice his sense of criticism should remain. Slowly, and maybe painfully, the student will read with deeper appreciation the best stories of the west. The anthologies could well replace stories of this type with those of the best that have "meat" in them. Western short stories which could be
substituted are Jack London's "All Gold Canyon," and Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel." Another story of this region is Wilbur Schramm's "Windwagon Smith," which is a good beginning for the student's introduction to the West. Other good stories of the West are by Dorothy Johnson who depicts the relation between the Indians and the whites very ably in a book called Indian Country.

The teacher will find that some of the best literature of the West is in several recent novels. Such novels as The Way West by A. B. Guthrie, Jr., The Ox-Cow Incident by Walter Van TilburgClark, and Honey in the Horn by H. L. Davis will give the student a picture of the West as the West really was.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

APPLICATION OF THIS STUDY TO TEACHING METHODS

This study has developed one kind of critical approach toward analyzing short stories; it is a method which determines what the author has attempted to do, why he has done so, and how successfully he has worked out his theme.

In most modern stories, the completeness results from the episodes in a story being combined to make believable a "change" in one of the characters. All action hinges upon this change, either a weakening or a strengthening in his person to any resistance he is forced to face. In "Flight" Pepe is changed from a lazy boy to a brave man who faces death unflinchingly. The changes can be in the character's moral traits or in his attitude toward himself or others. Oakhurst, in Harte's story, has changed from a lonely pariah in the first episodes of the story to a man who is concerned with the welfare of his fellow outcasts. Some short stories do not present a change in the character, but bring about a change in the attitude of the reader. The reader is confronted with the inconsistencies of the character, but the author induces the reader to conjecture about the motives underlying his behavior.
For example, such is the case in Hawthorne's story, "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment;" the reader wonders if the experiment took place or if it were only a delusion on the part of the old people. In "The Purloined Letter," Poe wants the reader to be amazed at the chess-like intellect of Dupin when the reader finishes the story.

When the teacher realizes that the author is entirely free to create whatever characters-in-relationship he wishes to place them in whatever setting he wishes; when the teacher realizes that the author is free to manipulate the characters in whatever succession of events or situations he wishes; when the teacher realizes that the author is free to create his world as near to reality or as far from reality as he chooses; when the teacher recognizes that an author is free to use language, figures, symbols, and descriptive background as he wishes; when a teacher understands the attitudes of the author toward his created characters; and when the teacher recognizes that any writer is free to create certain characters in certain relationships in a particular setting, and that this is called the "author's intention" or "theme," then the teacher is able to bring to the student an understanding of the story. The best way for the teacher to bring these to the student is by using various stories and by comparing one story with another.

Without some kind of method, a busy teacher's
handling of literature is an uneven affair, sometimes sound and sometimes inept, depending on the time at his disposal, his knowledge of the author, and his individual tastes. If the teacher has learned to analyze and evaluate short stories, using the procedure outlined and illustrated in the preceding chapters, he is ready to teach his pupils to read more intelligently and to help them create a taste for better material. He begins by guiding their reading and thinking through skillful questions which cause them to read and to consider the story more carefully. As they gain in ability to read, the questions may be fewer, until the students are able to discuss the story without such direct help from the teacher.

Questions have a three-fold use. They should:

1. Cause the student to look carefully at the text.
2. Teach him to use the inductive method to arrive at a conclusion.
3. Encourage him to evaluate the story.

Following are examples of the kind of questions which can be used in handling the story "Flight."

1. What kind of lives did these people live? What incidents show they were not in contact with modern life?
2. What kind of boy was Pepe? How did he change after the accident?
3. Read carefully what we are told about the
quarrel and the knife throwing. Do you think Pepe might have fared better if he had submitted to the law?

4. Why did both he and his mother decide at once that he must run away to the hills even though they knew it was certain death for him? Under what circumstances was Pepe shot?

5. Throughout the story there are many references to rock. Find these. What does rock symbolize in this story?

6. What is the author's attitude toward these people?

7. What is the theme of the story?

Other suggested studies in critical evaluation of High School Literature

There are several other studies dealing with literature in the high school that can be carried on by graduate students. One study would be a critical evaluation of the most commonly taught novels in the high school. Most high school classes study one novel each year. Many of the new anthologies do not contain a novel, and the teacher must choose a novel which she thinks is desirable. After determining by means of a questionnaire the most commonly taught novels in Montana high schools, the investigator could make a critical evaluation of several of them. If he found the
novels that are used to be inferior in literary quality, he should propose substitutes by interpreting and evaluating novels which he considers better.

Another investigator might make a survey of the poetry found in high school anthologies, determining by a questionnaire those poems liked best by the students. The investigator could then interpret and evaluate these poems and devise a critical method for evaluating them which could be used for most poetry found in the high school anthologies.

An investigator might determine the plays most commonly found in our textbooks and apply a critical method of evaluating them. He could also determine the plays most commonly produced for the public by Montana high schools, with a view toward improving the quality of the plays chosen.

This study and other studies suggested above comprise a direct attack on what is being taught in the literature classes of the high schools and an attempt toward improving the quality of literature, but very little effort has been made toward devising any method of improving it. The selection of literature for anthologies has been done by someone who uses his intuitive sense of what is good, or relies partly on what past anthologies have contained, or chooses certain selections because they are considered classics. It must also be taken into consideration that
while the anthologies are compiled by teachers, the publishing is done by companies in business to make money; therefore, selections are made to sell the textbook. Some of the plays, short stories, and poems included are there because they will appeal to the student, not because they have real literary worth. Montana is a state large in area and small in population, thereby making an ideal situation for determining what is being taught and evaluating these selections.

If teachers become critical of the selections in textbooks and make their opinions known, the writers of anthologies will probably treat these opinions with respect. Therefore there is a great need for such studies as those suggested above.
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