

INSPIRED
**How to Put Your Thoughts
about Literature into
a Term Paper**

María Jesús Hernández Lerena

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into a Term Paper

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“I believe the best learning process of any kind of craft is
just to look at the work of others.”

Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize for Literature

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1. Introduction: Potential usefulness of this book

In a world bent on instant results, where an abundance of information is provided at the push of a button, the idea of *process* has somehow fallen into disuse. Process is the path that leads us from an initial desire or objective to a result, an interval that takes time, effort, much work, some frustrating moments and a degree of patience. In the academic world, where the display of information is greatly valued and where mere accumulation may be mistaken for quality, such a profusion of available material on the internet may give the false impression that we own it without having really processed it. The case is that, when it comes to submitting written assignments in literature courses, the internet is often considered by students as the main means to rapidly snatch information and literally *throw it* into a paper.

In our contemporary world, where we can give shape to our physical and psychological identities through endless digital resources, the culture of copy and paste, of hiding oneself under the guise of another, is a dangerous habit that may be replicated unthinkingly by students when it comes to performing academically, especially if time is tight. Whether we want to admit it or not, many students enrolled in our universities believe that submitting written assignments, i.e. papers on literature, is a matter of finding and gathering information that will immediately fill the number of pages that each professor requires for a paper. But there is a difference between information and knowledge, between reproduction and contribution.

The idea to put this book together came from the difficulties students experience when trying to write essays, analysis papers, about literary texts. The digital world is not the only potential obstacle. Another important fact is that there is normally a writing deficit, that is, students usually have not had much practice at writing. Writing well in any language, especially in a language other than our mother tongue, requires continued effort and attentiveness, and also an awareness that ideas become such only when they have been embodied in words, sentences and paragraphs.

Limited verbal skills will result in fewer opportunities to express ideas. As Northrop Frye said in his insightful article “Don’t You Think It’s Time to Start Thinking?”:

[m]ost students need to be taught, very carefully and patiently, that there is no such thing as an inarticulate idea waiting to have the right words wrapped around it. They have to learn that ideas do not exist until they have been incorporated into words. Until that point you don’t know whether you are pregnant or just have gas on the stomach. (234)

Frye claimed the need to give our own expression more importance because power structures preserve their control precisely through the use of stereotyped and ready-made phrases that only

articulated people will be able to contest. That is why, according to him, “[t]he teaching of humanities is [...] a militant job”, one that will encourage students to find ways of expression that reveal meaning rather than reproduce clichés. If we allow language *to use us*, and vocabularies can sometimes be dangerously seductive, we may end up forming part of certain dehumanizing ideologies that circulate in our society without even realizing it.

On a different front, another circumstance that may prevent students from putting down into paper their reaction to a text is a sense of inferiority, a disheartening feeling that we have all experienced. When we do not know with precision how high the stakes are, we may believe we are not good enough, clever enough, knowledgeable enough. This uneasiness may affect all of us, no matter how long we have been teaching, writing, doing research, and publishing. No matter how fluent one is in a foreign language, one may be occasionally engulfed by a feeling of dismay when comparing what we think we *can* actually write with what other experts or scholars *have already written* and disseminated on a topic.

The students addressed by this book belong to an age range or education range that covers their undergraduate studies and their master’s degree courses. Especially at early learning stages, students may not have reached the command over the English language that allows them to write flawless essays, let alone in an academic jargon that they do not yet master. If they start from this sense of inferiority, the task of writing an academic paper will, of course, look daunting and joyless and this will affect their motivation negatively. As a way out of this predicament and, in order to meet the academic standards, students may pose in their papers as experts, displaying a borrowed language that is not theirs. They may also take ideas and words from an array of sources and mix them—probably randomly—with their own, adding, juxtaposing, or accumulating comments without real integration. This may result in a confusing mixture in which they did not follow their own perceptions or constructed their own perspective but followed that of others.

This may be due to the fact that students often assume that literary texts have already been “explained” by others and that, therefore, their role is to find those explanations with a view to summarizing or reproducing those conclusions in their papers. Some students even read interpretations of the literary works before reading the stories, poems or novels themselves, so in their papers they just reiterate the views they found in existing criticism. In this case, the direct, unmediated contact between them as readers and text has unfortunately been skipped, as well as the chance to embark on a process of learning and self-discovery that involves the effort to articulate perceptions and ideas and transform them into analysis.

Indeed, one of the aims of good and honest writing is being able to clearly show what has come out of our minds as different from what has been borrowed from other sources, that is, to describe to what extent we have been able to build on from previous knowledge. Sadly, we, educators, know that when marking essays much of our time is taken up by finding proof that attests to plagiarism, when instead we should be thoroughly engaged in assessing their quality. Acknowledging one’s sources is a practice that a number of students are reluctant to follow, at least all the time, partly because that implies less thinking and writing effort, but also because it demands a good familiarization with citing styles they may find a bit confusing and that may be rapidly forgotten. Teaching students to cite properly is essential to make their work comply with academic standards of originality and ethics.

For the reasons stated above, this book attempts to offer some help in areas of difficulty that may prevent students from binding *inspiration* to *writing*. In order to do so, we will work with

examples taken from the work of other students in their same situation, students who may have initially felt at a loss when writing an essay and needed help in the stages of topic choice, paper structuring, quoting and assessment. Besides its potential usefulness as a guide to essay writing, in this book we wish to show the benefits of reading and writing, of an academic as well as of a more personal nature: in doing so we celebrate the wisdom that writers of all times and geographies have so generously given to attentive readers, a gift that makes us better people in every sense. This book came into being as the result of the rewarding experience of teaching fourth-year students two courses on American and Postcolonial Literatures in 2017 and 2018. When the academic year was over, I sent the students a call to participate in a project I had been considering for some time. I wanted to include some of their submitted work in an open access book that would analyze the processes of writing term papers and thus serve as motivation, inspiration and reference to future students that may feel uncertain as to what to expect in the literature courses on the last year of their degree. Looking at the work of others, as in the quote by Wole Soyinka, is the best way to learn a craft.

The eleven students that participated in the project are, in alphabetical order: Yosra Hamdoun Bghiyel, Analía Herrera Salazar, Jesús López Antoñanzas, Leire Martín Antón, Janire Martínez Sarrías, Elizabeth Navarro Echeverría, Carla Ovejas Ramírez, Sara Paniagua Ortega, Concepción Peñaranda Díaz, Sheila Pita Ezquerro, and Oana Plamada. To them I express my gratitude for their enthusiastic participation in the classes and for kindly handing over their assignments so that they could be examined in this book. I will discuss their work in detail as well as literally listen to their voices, because these students will share with us their opinions on literature and they will answer my questions regarding their role as students, readers and incipient critics.

Since this volume is based on this particular context, the recommendations given in it do not have to necessarily apply to all learning and teaching situations at university, to all kinds of literature courses, or to all kind of essays. These recommendations spring from the teaching experiences of an educator with her students—an experience that spans over 30 years—in undergraduate, master and doctoral courses at the University of La Rioja. The main focus is on the fourth year, the year when students graduate and have to do a number of written tasks for two courses on several literatures written in English. The analyzed samples are taken mainly from American, Canadian and Caribbean literature, but can be used as reference to writing about other literatures, learning stages, or research tasks.

Sometimes I will be addressing students directly as “you” because, on the one hand, I do not wish to take on the detached perspective of someone who is totally above and beyond the problems I seek to solve and, on the other, because I feel a closeness to the book’s potential readers that a too formal style would fail to convey. Sometimes I use the personal pronoun “we”, a group that may sometimes include, beside myself, students of literature and also other lecturers of literature who may have had experiences similar to mine.

I apologize if my tone may appear at times a bit too maternal or if it sounds prescriptive; the former approach cannot be helped and the latter effect is far from my intention. My aim is, above all, to encourage students to engage in a satisfying and fruitful exploration of the wonders of literature. My hope is that this book can be of some use to both students and educators, who may perhaps see themselves reflected in it.

2. Dispelling preconceived ideas before starting to work on your proposal

An essay is not a receptacle to solely include other people's ideas. It must have a sense of direction, a pre-established purpose and an appropriate structure which you must strive to create. Often this structure comes to you by considering a central idea that could be conducive to a deeper understanding of one or several aspects of a literary text.

Sometimes it is taken for granted that a term paper, an essay, is not really about engaging in analysis but about completing a Word or a PDF document with three sections. The first one would consist of some biographical facts about the author as a way of introduction. The second one would include other information about the writer's work, as found on the internet and/or other print sources. And the third, final section, usually brief, would basically repeat what has been said before, adding a cursory comment on whether or not the student liked the text. These wrong assumptions about essay writing do not end here. We can also mention that students often think that the title of the novel, story or poem should make, without any addition, the title of the essay.

We must clarify that the title of the essay should include an indication, however brief, of the specific topic, kind of analysis, or critical perspective the student will undertake. The corpus of an essay (the text or texts under discussion) is not the same as the subject-matter or the purpose of the essay. That is why a work's title is not enough for a title of a paper. More importantly, oftentimes, the section called "Introduction" is exclusively *filled* with the author's biography; the section "Analysis" contains mostly paraphrases of the plot or obvious descriptions of the topic of the story, novel, or poem, and the "Conclusion" does not recapitulate the main points of interest or advances further discussion of the topics.

This is frustrating for the teacher or professor, who is there on the other end, so to speak, to observe how the student thinks, not how other people think, however knowledgeable they may be. The teacher is there to identify and assess the student's ability to assimilate and analyze the information, i.e., the critical sources she or he is using. Educators wish to help students in a learning process that leads them to take steps forward in research; it is not for them to assess *perfect* critical responses that have been written by somebody else. As mentioned earlier on, some students are often discouraged when they read what academics have already written about a literary work because they believe that they have to imitate them, and therefore they reproduce sections of criticism more or less literally. In full truth, some other students are not discouraged but happy to take parts of available publications, academic or otherwise, and pass it as their own. Sometimes this is done knowingly and sometimes without an awareness of incurring into plagiarism.

An idea that perhaps could situate students in a different, more positive frame of mind before beginning to write, would be to imagine a common space between the literary text and

themselves, a personal space yet to be created and designed, like an open field in a landscape, or a house yet to be built. Within this space that belongs to them and to the text only, they would have the freedom to express themselves in the awareness that their words will assemble a particular interpretation, a specific understanding of what they have witnessed.

In the kind of essay proposed here which, as mentioned earlier, is just one possible type of essay, we can combine perceptions of our imaginary world, creativity, and documentation at different doses. The proposed essay is argumentative, not descriptive; reflective not encyclopedic. Brief and to the point, the focus would be mainly on an aspect, an idea, an image, an event, a message, a strategy, a rhetorical device; any aspect related to the text's aesthetic, ideological or ethical stance. That particular something would give the paper a centre of gravity around which the student's interpretation may revolve.

Things do not usually go this way. Imagine an academic year full of wonderful learning and teaching experiences. Then, the time comes when students have to write the final term paper. What happens to those communicative and thinking skills that have been honed during the course of the classes? Perceptions, discoveries, findings, insights, articulated intuitions that have often been reached jointly by students and professor during the term. Unfortunately, these skills and realizations are often forgotten, not put into use when writing the essay, and this happens due to the inertia of sticking with the wrong notion of what an essay should be, that is, a more or less big amount of "reliable" information taken from bibliographical sources or internet ready-made essays. This assumption, as has been discussed earlier on, disregards elaboration and proper research.

Let's not do that. Let's try not to include information that does not contribute to digging deeper into a topic. Let's prioritize a careful observation to the particulars of the text over peripheral considerations. Practice the art of attentiveness: how does a literary text contribute to our impression of characters, to our reaching of certain conclusions? Does it make us look at life from an unusual angle? How does it create new meanings or dismantles commonly agreed definitions of things? How does it reshape our understanding of the world and of history? Which realities does it make visible?

When you start writing, remember that a sentence leads you to another and then to another: do not neglect the coherence that must be created between them. Try not to be derailed from the path of an initial conception by the pressing need to merely accumulate information. Juxtaposing excerpts that may send your reader off to different directions does not often work well. You have to elaborate every idea before you move on. Writing needs the presence of an inner voice that sees to it that each sentence and paragraph does not sidetrack a potentially good point. You have to consider what is important and must avoid being superficial or trite.

These commonsensical suggestions may seem obvious to many, but in fact they are not, as in our teaching practice we see otherwise. Usually, there are not courses exclusively devoted to teaching and learning how to write. Professors, therefore, need to save some energy to be mentors and editors besides attending to the more conventional tasks of providing contextualization and analysis. We try to awake in students an enthusiasm to discover different ways to look at the world, we try to inspire and motivate them and also to channel their potential. In the face of the lack of courses devoted to writing, all these tasks have to be fulfilled by the professor simultaneously during literature classes; it is necessary to teach students a craft while transmitting other kinds of knowledge.

3. Parts of the book: Their nature and purpose

The kind of guidance provided in this book covers mainly three areas: 1. finding a good topic for a paper, 2. giving it shape and, 3. citing correctly and preparing a Works Cited section (MLA style). For these three areas, samples of term papers will be given, sometimes they will be excerpts, sometimes full essays, which come with a step-by-step analysis on the part of the professor. This analysis reflects on thematic and textual choices, writing strategies for giving structure and texture to the essays, use of documentation, etc. Some of the sections include the students' reflections on how they wrote their papers and what they learnt from doing so. Recommended bibliography and webography about certain topics are also provided in certain instances.

There is a final section entitled "testimonials", where some students pay homage to the magic of literature and give written materiality to some of the things they perceived when reading the texts or attending classes. These notes, which they have written especially for this publication, are truly enlightening and they show that, as a popular saying has it, education is not a matter of filling a container but of lighting a spark.

The term papers presented here follow an increasing order of complexity. All of them have undergone several processes of copyediting on my part to make the essays meet standards of grammar, style, coherence and citation. I have also revised their flow and structure. This was done to enhance the student's insights, give more precision to their ideas and make them an adequate example for future students. However, the editing has not been too heavy in order to preserve as much as possible the original characteristics of the submitted essays. The papers included in this book are not model essays as such, they are regarded more as examples that create a site for observation and learning and allow some space for improvement. Providing absolutely impeccable essays would have had the aforementioned off-putting effect that scholarly essays often have on a person who is in the process of acquiring literary critical skills. The perfect piece of criticism is often felt to have an unattainable quality and has a dispiriting effect on students. The quotations by well-known philosophers or writers that precede each section are meant as a general comment on the section's purpose and also serve as an encouragement.

Thus, it should be noted that we are not showing here completely flawless essays such as the finished "products" that circulate on the web. Our purpose is to find the potential of essays that have been written by students learning the craft, a kind of paper that is not often given visibility in the academic world. Most of the time, term papers by students remain solely a matter of grading and they are not used outside this context. Here, they allow us to observe how students within age groups similar to our intended readers (first to fourth-year undergraduates and students of master's courses) connect their knowledge of the world they live in to that of the stories and poems they discuss. In an attempt to be as least obtrusive as possible, my comments on their work is intended to clarify ideas, identify insights and propose practical methods. My goal is to offer tips

to describe, analyse and interpret texts, that is, to share ideas about how to transition from the level of the personal impression to that of proper analysis.

The section on citing is meant as a quick guide to referencing sources, both in the text of the essay and in the final “Works Cited” section. I have followed the latest edition of MLA citing style, as it is widely used method in literary studies. Plenty of examples have been included for each particular case as well as explanations that clarify common errors. In this and other sections, students will find a selection of useful web resources that can further help them in matters related to essay writing. REMEMBER to right-click the links provided to open them in a new tab or window in order to access the information in these resources.

Please, note that square parentheses with three dots, [...], indicate that a part of a student’s essay has been edited out.

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

Aristotle

4. Finding a topic

4.1. The ethical search

In this section we will deal with the work of Carla Ovejas Ramírez, namely, what it meant for her to find and write about a specific topic. After Carla answers a couple of my questions, we will be able to analyse the tools she used to write her essay on a short story by the North American writer O. Henry.

1. Why did you choose O. Henry? What is it that you liked about his work when you read “The Last Leaf”?

I have always been interested in O. Henry because I am drawn to the short story and I think he is one of the best short story practitioners of his time. What I liked about the short story “The Last Leaf” was the way in which he narrated a tragic event such as a pneumonia epidemic through the story of an old artist that saves the life of a young artist, creating, in this way, his most important work so far.

2. What do you think are the advantages of comparing a written and a visual text?

I think it makes you understand the story better, because most of the times there are changes, and this makes you notice the core elements of the written text and the differences that exist between these two media. Moreover, I think it makes you understand the way in which a text changes depending not only on the medium but also on the time that separates the written text and the visual text.

In her essay, Carla drew a comparison between the narrative strategies found in the short story “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry and its adaptation into a movie directed by Henry King, a classical Hollywood director of the 1950s. Many students are interested in analyzing the differences between written narratives and their filmic counterpart. One of the advantages of this

approach is that it creates an opportunity to learn about how two different media work, and it hones your perceptive skills when it comes to noticing how little changes in the filmic version might actually lead to totally different interpretations of the story. The title of this paper is “The Gift of the Magi: A Comparison between the Short Story and the Movie”.

Carla first introduces us into the story’s atmosphere by focusing on the physical details of the setting. She quotes from the story at all times and draws conclusions of a wider significance through those very details:

This short story presents us with a young couple, Della and Jim, living in a very tiny flat. They are described as extremely poor, in fact, the short story starts with the sentence “One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all” (2), and so we realise from the very beginning that we are dealing with a story about poverty. But there is much more than that. Della is the first character presented to us, she is described as “the mistress of the home” and “slender” (2-3). Her major concern is what to buy Jim for Christmas. Jim is described as a “poor fellow” who is only “twenty-two” (5). Characters in the story are not fully drawn, we have just some crucial details that make us build them up. We only have three characters, the two mentioned above and Madame Sofronie, the woman to whom Della sells her hair. Unlike the other two characters, to Madame Sofronie Della’s hair is not valuable, she determines its worth by weighing it with her hand, and this is set into contrast with the importance it has in Della’s life.

Even though I have mentioned that there are only three characters, I think we can also consider the narrator as a character. We have a down-to-earth narrator; he addresses us (the reader) directly. We get clear examples from the text: “forget the hashed metaphor” (4), “which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task” (4). The narrator is present throughout the story; this narrator gives us explanations such as “this dark assertion will be illuminated later on” (6). All these statements make us think that the narrator might be regarded as the fourth character in the story. He reflects on the story with the intention of guiding us, of making his point clear. There is a moment when he says “which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating” (2). In this sense, the narrator is addressing the reader, he warns the reader that life is not only about happiness, but about recurrent bad moments.

To my mind, one of the main themes of this short story is poverty, it is conspicuous throughout, “A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad” (2), “only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim” (3), “on went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat” (3) (my emphasis in all cases). These three different examples illustrate how poor they are. They are poor as regards money and material things, but not regarding love, they are very rich on that aspect. This theme of poverty is presented in contrast to generosity, another crucial topic in the short story.

This generosity is presented in their acts of kindness. Della sells her hair, which was her only treasure, and likewise, Jim pawned his watch, which was inherited over three

generations. But this generosity is not only superficial, a mere act of giving a gift, but deeper, as they sell their most valuable treasures-and the only things they possessed-in order to buy a present to the person they love. Indeed, they sell their treasures to enhance the treasure of the other, as Ahmad Bilal has pointed out (2). After all, love is their most precious gift and what really matters is the fact that they have each other.

Once Carla has pointed to the underlying themes in the story, she goes on to explain how the author deals with poverty in specific terms, i.e., using humour and allusions to the Bible:

O. Henry uses irony cleverly, this story is very sad, but with the use of irony, the author humours the issue of poverty. Humour is used to describe the little money Della has: "That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied" (2). This passage illustrates the use of humour, and how it changes our perception when we read the story, we may laugh when we read this, even if this is a very sad moment in the story. In my opinion, the author may have said that the little money she had was in pennies in order to stress the fact that she has very little indeed.

There are also several relevant allusions to the Bible which are chosen to highlight the huge importance of Della's hair and of Jim's watch:

Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window someday to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy. (2)

With these allusions to the queen of Sheba and to King Salomon, the narrator emphasises how important these treasures are to Della and Jim. Apart from that, I think it is also used to stress the importance and dignity of these two characters, as they are compared to a queen and a king. At the end of the story they are also compared to the Three Wise Men, in fact they are portrayed as the wisest of all, the real Magi.

That was the first part of Carla's essay. Now she will describe how these details were adapted to the screen: how characters are introduced in the film, whether or not the plot has been changed, how these changes affect characterization and perspective, how humour comes across, etc. After that analysis, the conclusion has to do with the ethical significance that transpires in the story:

Ultimately, they learn a very important lesson, and they get the most perfect present they could have received, they learn that their love is the most valuable gift, a gift that is not an object but much more than that. Material things can come and go at any time, but their

love will always stay with them. Both short story and film share this message. However, at the end of the short story, the narrator clarifies what really matters: "But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who gives gifts these two were the wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi" (8). This final statement does not appear in the movie. The movie ends with Della and Jim together by the window of their humble house.

Carla's conclusion points to the existence of a basic story or plot that can be embodied differently in different media. She is aware that these differences may indicate ideological changes, changes in the ways in which we interpret characters and their dilemmas. This last idea has lots of potential and can be further developed:

After this analysis, I have realised that a single story can receive several treatments, and in this case, Henry King, the film's director, has introduced new elements. I find O. Henry's depiction of universal characters really appealing as we can identify with them. In sum, I think that the movie introduces new ingredients, such as more characters, and it also provides us with a more romanticized story because it is influenced by the filmic conventions of the time. After all, this story can become real to some extent, because in an unexpected crisis, we might face the same situation as the characters of this story, that is why I think this short story points to one of the most important things in life: material possessions are not as important as they may seem.

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The Gift of the Magi. Directed by Henry King, 20th century Fox, 1952.

“The eyes of others our prisons; their thoughts our cages.”

Virginia Woolf

4.2. Making trouble with gender

Another suggestion for essay writing is to draw knowledge from texts that describe the oppressive reality of a particular historical period. In the following example, Leire Martín Antón brought together three texts by three fascinating female writers that were struggling to redefine the worth of women in nineteenth-century America. Emily Dickinson formed part of the course reading list, but Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman did not. In the case of Emily Dickinson, Leire directed her attention to poems that we had not discussed in class, leading her to experience a sense of discovery when she identified with the ideas expressed in them. By reading these additional texts, Leire was able to discern the kind of stereotypes historically imposed on women by men and by society at large and describe how different women felt and coped with a life predefined for them at birth.

Before showing you some fragments of her essay, I would like you ask you to listen to Leire talking about being inspired by literature and, especially, by feminism.

1. How did you come up with the idea of writing an essay about three female writers? Had you read them before? What did you feel when you were reading them?

I spent my third year at the university studying in Ireland thanks to an Erasmus scholarship. There I had the chance to take 11 courses about literature. In the second semester I took American literature and I got to know some authors. I have always felt so identified with feminist issues and values and learning about Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Charlotte Perkins helped me to delve deeper into the literature written by women. Therefore, during my 4th year, in the course on American literature, I had the chance to write my final essay about whatever I wished. I wanted to get to know more about those feminist authors, and I knew I wanted to read some of their masterpieces. So, for this reason I decided to read two short stories that conveyed these ideas and write about them.

2. Was it difficult to work with feminist ideas? What kind of feminist criticism were you aware of before your fourth year at university?

Feminism has always taught me that women live with less privileges than men. Therefore, it is necessary to understand where all this started and what we have gone through to get to fight for justice in the search for equality between men and women. Thanks to courses such as *American Literature* this year at the University of La Rioja, I understood what it was like to be a woman in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Literature is an essential means to portray repressed ideas and thoughts, even though some of them had to do it by

other names or just hide, as Emily Dickinson, for example. Thanks to those women's masterpieces we have the testimonies of women all over the world that have suffered for a long time just for the fact of being female.

3. What was your most profound learning that came about with the writing of your essay? (or with the reading list in these two courses of literature on your fourth year at university?)

After reading Dickinson's poetry, I wanted to find more poems in which she dealt with gender issues, then I learnt this wasn't an isolated case, and more women were being and feeling trapped, turning writing into the only way out. It sounds insane that such a harmless activity as writing was forbidden for women. I always remember the case of Mary Shelley whose works were signed by her husband and that drives me nuts. I think there was a common feeling about gender issues in most novels of those times, as we saw in, for example, *Washington Square*. However, I feel really interested that we could see different perspectives on the topic. One of the works that impressed me was *The House of Mango Street*, I was surprised to find that the nineteenth century sexist attitudes were still in place in the twentieth century. All in all, I would recommend to read some of these books to people who don't believe in feminism.

In what follows, you will be presented with some excerpts from Leire's essay, the introduction especially, so that you can observe how she creates the hypothesis, grounds her essay in specific examples and creates thinking space for the work of three writers ahead of their time. In the last excerpt from her essay, you will find a sample of some of the conclusions that she reached when she found in domesticity the reason why women were psychologically damaged.

"Women in the Nineteenth Century: Emily Dickinson's Poetry, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's 'Old Woman Magoun' and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'"

During the nineteenth century women were treated as minors. Women and men were considered different from each other, and not only physically but mentally too. Women lived in the private sphere, as there was a common belief in that time that women belonged to the house. Their only aspiration in life was to take care of the family, give birth to children and do the household chores. This belief is called the cult of domesticity or the "cult of the true womanhood". One of the main causes of this belief was the Industrial Revolution and the new availability of jobs; men were supposed to work in the public sphere and earn money and therefore women were expected to take care of the family and the house. The traits of "true women" were piety, submissiveness, purity and domesticity. According to Barbara Welter, these attributes were "put all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power" (152). In that time, there were magazines which maintained this belief with numerous

articles about how to be the perfect wife. However, many female writers who lived in the nineteenth century disagreed with this belief. These diverging ideas can be seen in the works of writers such as Emily Dickinson, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

[...]

Let's consider Emily Dickinson's poem number 445 "They Shut Me in Prose", a poem that challenges the idea of the cult of domesticity:

They shut me up in Prose -

As when a little Girl

They put me in the Closet -

Because they liked me "still" -

Still! Could themselves have peeped -

And seen my Brain - go round -

They might as well have lodged a Bird

For Treason - in the Pound -

Himself has but to will

And easy as a Star

Look down upon Captivity -

And laugh - No more have I -

In this poem, Dickinson voices her disagreement with male dominance over women. In the writing world, as in all other places, men had the monopoly. The pronoun "they" (lines 1, 3, 7) represents the male world, the patriarchal society. Women were supposed to just write letters, so men could dominate poetry. On the other hand, "little girls" (l. 2) were supposed to be "still" (l. 4), which means silent, passive, calm, motionless. Women were expected to belong to the private sphere and be quiet and docile. Dickinson was put in a closet (l. 3) and, therefore, she did not fulfill the list of attributes of the true woman, she could not express herself. But it does not matter how many times they try to imprison her, "himself has but to will" (l. 9), they cannot control her mind. Conversely, imprisoning her makes her thoughts stronger. She uses the metaphor of the bird to emphasize innocence and confinement. In her conclusion, Dickinson laughs at the captors (l. 12). She is mocking them because they think they can stop her, but instead of quietening her, they have inspired her to write about it. The whole poem pokes fun at male patriarchs.

[...]

"Old Woman Magoun" tells the story of a grandmother who kills her grandchild in order to save her from her father's cruelty. In this story Freeman discusses family traditions of the time. The grandmother is a powerful character and although she is not passive, she still stays in the private sphere, taking care of the family and of the house. However, she is at odds with the idea of the traditional feminine woman: she is physically strong and even shows some male traits. This idea of reversing gender roles could be seen as revolutionary in the nineteenth century.

The story starts with a statement of how the old woman feels about men: "that men can't do nothin' without havin' to drink and chew to keep their sperits up" (207). The characters are depicted as archetypes of fairy tales. The granddaughter, Lily, is a childish girl. She represents innocence and youth. Therefore, she is like the princess of the story. She seems to be the representation of purity in the novel as regards to the cult of domesticity. The old woman Magoun felt she needed to take care of her when her mother died. She is very protective towards Lily. "She had a curious authority over most people when she chose to exercise it" (214), and this assertive attitude was supposed to belong to men. She is brave enough to disagree with Nelson Barry, Lily's father. She protects Lily from the cult of domesticity but in a cruel way: the bondage of domesticity in this period led her to kill Lily in order to avoid impositions such as marrying a man she did not love. She can be considered to be inhuman or mad.

[...]

"The Yellow Wallpaper" tells the story of a woman who feels oppressed by her husband. She lives locked in her room, she is ill and the only thing that seems to heal her is staying at home. The husband has banned her to go outside: while he represents the century's enlightenment she becomes a symbol of captivity. Women are trapped by society, as Dickinson was in her bird's cage.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman has a woman as the only protagonist of the story. Her husband is a doctor, and he does not believe she is sick. He uses nicknames to call her, which denies her personhood. The repetition of "John says John says..." in the story is maddening. John is a replacement of the narrator's will. When she narrates one can feel him presiding over her thoughts. He becomes the idea of patriarchy, along with Jane, his sister. John decides on all matters of their lives, and even when he refuses to believe she is sick, he keeps saying "we are here for you to rest." The bars on the window are a clear symbol of imprisonment and isolation. She was thought to be mad, and madness was treated with lack of understanding and sympathy. Women were thought to be more likely to suffer from hysteria because of the changes that their bodies and minds went through. John is active, while she is passive. There is an implicit hierarchy. Perkins Gilman uses imagery ironically to create the idea of John as rational and the woman as irrational. The appallingly limiting circumstances that the woman has to go through enrage the reader. On an ideological level, Gilman defies with this narrative the myth of *inherent* feminine and masculine traits.

[...]

The sense of confinement in the room is essential as well. The wallpaper is the most symbolic element; because of the colour but also on account of the women that the protagonist sees trapped in it. The protagonist has a conflict in her mind: she wants to behave as a good wife (her duty), but she also wants to think for herself and be free to write: "I think that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me" (157). This submission in women was usually the reason of their madness.

Works Cited

Freeman, Mary Wilkins. "Old Woman Magoun." *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, edited by Joyce Carol Oates, Oxford UP, 2013. Web. 2 Dic. 2017.

Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. "The Yellow Wallpaper." *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. Web. 14 Dic. 2017.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1966, pp. 151-174.

Leire found in the stories by women the inspiration to articulate her observations about the processes society activates in order to classify people and to assign different roles to them. The literary texts she used were written in the 19th century and, since then, many other writers and researchers have been able to put into words the experience of being a woman and the ideologies that historically have attempted either to downgrade or to liberate women.

In this connection, you can find these websites and blogs interesting:

thefeministwire.com

shewrites.com

wcc.stanford.edu/resources/feminist-websites-blogs-and-resources

Also, the following books are classics (among very many on feminism) and they can get you started in the feminist perspectives:

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke UP, 2017.

Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier, Cape, 2009.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale, 1979.

hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. South End Press, 1999.

Perreault, Jeanne. *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autobiography*. U of Minnesota P, 1995.

“A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say ‘Slum!’
because he could see no more. But we who lived there saw
our street as a world, where everybody was
quite different from everybody else.”
(Naipaul, *Miguel Street*)

4.3. Literature Going Global

A fascinating option is to go for a Nobel prize writer you haven't read so far. If they belong to distant cultures, this will give you the opportunity to delve into imaginary universes that may take you to far away lands, where people may live realities you had never heard of but may turn out to be closer to you than you expected. This is the case of V. S. Naipaul. A controversial writer in real life, his writing career is wide and deep. One of my students, Analía Herrera Salazar, decided to focus her essay on Naipaul's best-known collection of stories, *Miguel Street*. Reading his stories gave her a sense of the stagnation felt in a neighborhood embodying the ironies coming from the contrast between dream and reality.

“Social, Family and Gender roles in *Miguel Street*: A Description”

Miguel Street is a collection of short stories written by V.S. Naipaul. It consists of seventeen short stories that together form the recollections of an unnamed narrator that looks back at his childhood and adolescence. Each story is woven by the memories of the narrator around a particular community in Trinidad in the 1940s. The collection can be considered autobiographical, as Naipaul lived in Trinidad and left it to go to England (Su 54-55).

What characterizes these stories is that each protagonist is presented as a comical or mysterious person, but later on it is shown that their lives are full of disillusionment. It seems as if it were impossible to escape from Miguel Street and there is also a sense of sadness that its residents feel in their daily lives. This is seen in characters such as Bogart, Popo, Laura or Morgan. All of them live a life of disappointment. While some, such as Popo, prefer to adapt to that situation, others cannot accept the banality of their lives and prefer to create an illusion that will be later revealed, like Bogart.

Naipaul wanted to depict Trinidad from the perspective of its inhabitants and this is important because he does not find the Caribbean to be the idyllic place often publicized as a tourist paradise. He offers a realistic description of Trinidad in the period of the Second World War from the perspective of a Hindu boy on his way to adolescence. Naipaul depicts what happens to a society when it is ruled by people from outside that culture (Gorra 81), and makes us witness how this lack of adjustment affects the culture, the society and even the very growth of children.

[...]

Works Cited

Gorra, Michael. *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie*. The U of Chicago P, 1997.

Naipaul, V.S. *Miguel Street*. Heinemann, 2000.

Su, John J. *Ethics and nostalgia in the contemporary novel*. Cambridge UP, 2005.

From this point on, Analía goes on to study the pattern of behavior and the expectations of the different characters in the collection. She mainly shows how the hierarchical and violent relationships between men and women are sometimes turned upside down. Perhaps you can try to imagine what you would have written about this book had you chosen to speak about these or similar topics.

“The imperial project of educating the natives has influenced the identities of millions of people, all over the world, who realised that they remained subordinate dependents of an authority based somewhere other than in their lives.”

(Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*)

4.4. Exploring less-known literary texts

Jean Rhys is an author usually favoured by students because they have read her beautiful suggestive novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* in another course. This novel is frequently held up as an example of the rewriting of a canonical English text from the point of view of its subaltern society, more precisely, from the point of view of the woman who had been denigrated and confined in the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brönte. An interesting idea is to explore Jean Rhys's other works, her short stories, for example, because they are not often included in university curricula and give the student a more ample perspective of her work. Rhys was able to project the legacy of Caribbean history into narratives that show the negative consequences of colonization on all the communities involved and, at the same time, create beautiful and poignant storylines that hypnotize the reader. Sheila Pita Ezquerro decided to navigate the exotic and turbid waters of Caribbean societies where everything is more complicated than it seems at first sight. We present you with the beginning of her essay.

“Shadows of the Past in Jean Rhys's 'Fishy Waters'”

In this paper I will analyse the idea of postcolonialism as represented in Jean Rhys's short story “Fishy Waters”. Firstly, I will define the aims of post-colonial criticism and I will provide an explanation of the reasons and relevance of this concept in connection to the subject-matter of my study. Secondly, I will analyse that short story in connection to post-colonialism and its consequences, i.e., trauma and alienation. Finally, I will recapitulate the main issues and discuss the legacy of Jean Rhys.

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica in 1890, she was a Creole writer and one of the best-known representatives of Caribbean literature of the twentieth century. In her works, she dealt with complex issues related to her native land such as sexual abuse, alcoholism and post-colonial traumatic identities. All those issues are key in postcolonial studies and therefore Jean Rhys has been in the spotlight for many post-colonial critics.

When trying to define post-colonial criticism, Peter Barry stated that “postcolonial criticism draws attention to issues of cultural difference in literary texts and is one of several critical approaches [...] which focuses on specific issues, including issues of gender (feminist criticism), of class (Marxist criticism) and of sexual orientation (lesbian/gay criticism)” (191). He claims that post-colonial studies very especially focus on white representations of colonial countries, on the consequences of colonialism in society and its marks on identity formation. Therefore, post-colonialism strongly vindicates the culture in

the colonies, their history, and their identity (190). Nowadays those issues are on the forefront of academic life and I would like to revise them in my essay.

"Fishy Waters" is a clear example of postcolonial concerns. The story is set in Dominica and narrates the sexual assault committed by a white man, Mr. Longa, on a Negro child and the subsequent trial. The story starts with the controversy in a newspaper created by citizens who complain about the presence of Mr. Longa on the island.

Works Cited

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester UP, 2002.

Rhys, Jean. *The Collected Short Stories*. Penguin Classics, 2017.

From here on, Sheila examines how the relationships among people in the island are ridden by hatred and prejudice on both sides of the racial divide. She provides examples of her observations and builds her argument upon this textual evidence from the story. We do not know whether Mr. Longa is guilty or innocent, as the story mainly revolves around the consequences of colonialism on the characters' mind; the seeds of hatred and prejudice are present in all factions. Sheila focuses on the kind of alienation suffered by the main characters in this story.

“Language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought,
to speak it, and by doing so, to make it true.”

Salman Rushdie

4.5. Other possibilities: Non-fiction

Another option when trying to find a topic for an essay is to pick up a non-fiction author that you have found inspirational, uplifting or thought-provoking and use the wisdom you think can be extracted from these texts to relate them to your idea of self-growth and justice. You can apply this knowledge to the values of the time you are living in, for example. In this case, Yosra Hamdoun Bghiyel chose Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1841 essay “Self-Reliance” in order to find out how his definition of identity and of fulfilment could be of use nowadays. We present you here with an excerpt from the beginning of Yosra’s essay and we will leave you to think about possible directions toward which the essay could be developed. Then, we will hear what Yosra has to say about the experience of writing her essay and about the relationship between literature and philosophy.

“Self-Reliance in Ralph Waldo Emerson”

The purpose of this essay is to provide an analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s work “Self-Reliance” by regarding it as a self-empowerment essay. I will pay attention to aspects such as the depiction of nature and the rendering of faith and also to other formal elements that permeate Emerson’s work. All of them revolve around a consideration of man in society and of his resolution to empower himself.

The quote that opens “Self-Reliance” is: “Ne te quaesiveris extra”, which means do not seek yourself outside yourself. By the same token, one of Emerson’s most famous quotes reads: “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” There is in both statements a similar ethical definition of what one should do in life: oneself is the main and best resource to achieve fulfilment and happiness. In this essay I will try to identify the claims Emerson made about the self and about his personal and social responsibilities.

Works Cited

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Selected Essays*. The Penguin American Library, 1982.

Questions professor-student

Why did you choose Emerson as the topic of your essay? And why “Self-Reliance” in particular?

I chose Waldo Emerson because it was an author we didn't work much during the course. Early on in our studies, in the course "Introduction to English Literature", we had worked on him a little bit but I only remembered that he was a 'transparent eye-ball'. I did not remember much about the author himself, but I think my previous knowledge led me to think that there was something epic about him (as there is in many American authors). In classes you talked about Emerson's influence on Whitman's poetry, but there was still some fresh reading to do. It was also an opportunity to read other samples of transcendentalist philosophy.

The title of the essay called my attention, I understood it as a guide to self-empowerment and I liked the positive vibe it had. When I borrowed the book from the library I found that all the anthology of essays had some kind of positive message. My only thought before reading it was about the notion of "self-reliance" so I guess I started focusing on that. Besides that inspiring message, I felt more confident analysing an essay than a literary piece, where imagination would obviously have played a greater role. Distinguishing between arguments and examples was easier for me. In that sense, I found it easier examining only the ideas and putting them into perspective.

What is the most important thing you learnt when you wrote your essay?

Besides the fact that I needed to learn to proofread and cite, I think the most difficult part was to organise my ideas, not to simply assume the reader knows what I mean just by one sentence. I learned how to blend the author's arguments with my reflections. Instead of just doing the typical essay in which we compare the author's life with this work, I learned how to connect the author's ideas with previous texts such as *13 Virtues* by Benjamin Franklin or other materials worked in class. It was more about disentangling a bigger idea I had into different arguments.

Did you experience any difficulty?

When I got down to writing the essay it took me some time to plan a structure and to actually follow it. It wasn't easy to delimit what were my own ideas and what were Emerson's ideas because I totally agreed with him.

In which ways do you think that literature and philosophy can be used to achieve a more acute awareness of your life and of your environment?

We usually blame philosophy because it is "prescriptive" and literature for being "descriptive" and not providing a solution. Literature and philosophy both make reference to human experience. When both are integrated, a space is created for the reader to think: "this is all about social status..., it was a different society... but it still is about how to consider the world around us now".

Putting it all together is like forcing you, the reader, to discuss with the author while you are reading it. Emerson said that it was okay to be incongruent and not to have a fixed opinion. But I remember thinking that I was not okay with that idea, and I tried to go beyond incongruities. Thus, literature and philosophy place the reader in this kind of situation. Of course, it all depends on the vibe the reader is having that day, but regardless of that, we always gain some kind of awareness when we enter into that debate.

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

Robert Frost

4.6. Hunting Down for Details: A Full Essay

Another option for writing an essay is to hunt down an idea. For example, you may have read some stories by an author previously to the course or in the course and you want to explore how that writer expresses a particular idea or feeling. You may wish to find out what kind of characters, conflicts, images, scenes, etc., embody that idea, view or belief that you find to be recurrent and relevant in those narratives. You may consider them original and inspiring. Observing, describing, interpreting them may be worth the effort.

In this case, Jesús López Antoñanzas wished to explore the connections between the plots in Ernest Hemingway's stories and the author's outlook on life, as made known in his biographies. He found a very strong connection between a specific notion of fate and the philosophy of existentialism. The intertwining of these two notions—and moods—gave substance to his essay.

He starts with a caveat: although it is not always legitimate to produce interpretations of literary works by comparing them to the author's life, the case of Ernest Hemingway is a bit special. He was very much a public man, and there is an abundance of biographical information about him. So perhaps we can risk using the facts known about his life in order to throw light on the texts under discussion.

Please note that the full essay is being reproduced here.

"An Existentialist Approach to Ernest Hemingway"

Off we go. This is how the essay begins:

More often than not, readers tend to resort to an author's biography hoping to find a logical explanation for what they do not fully grasp when reading a literary work. Although sometimes that is not a fair thing to do, fundamental background information may be helpful in some particular cases, as when we deal with the figure of Ernest Hemingway.

His many adventures were reflected in some of his works. "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" was inspired by his safari trips to Africa; *The Old Man and the Sea* is clearly influenced by his love for fishing and his time in Cuba; his passion for boxing is portrayed by some characters like Ole Andreson in "The Killers"; and his ventures during wartime are also useful resources for works like *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway's life obviously had an impact on what he wrote, but not only on his characters or storylines but also on the deepest core of the work.

Once Jesús has set the basis of his analysis, he proceeds to give examples. He looks at the narratives from the point of view of the characters' attitude toward their destiny.

When reading Hemingway's works, one can identify some traits that seem to be significantly similar to some existentialist basis. In "The Killers", Swedish boxer Ole Andreson does not pay any attention to Nick Adam's warning: a couple of hitmen have the intention of killing him. In response, he remains lying in bed looking at the wall doing nothing. This can be understood as Andreson's failure to reclaim his life once he has to face imminent death, a destiny he has not chosen. Instead of getting out of town to change this terrible fate, he decides not to do so, which can be described as a passive attitude, frequently connected to quietism. As he refuses to choose his own destiny while he still can, the character of Andreson would fit in Sartre's category of cowardice (Sartre 1999).

A purposeless old man is portrayed in "Old Man at the Bridge" as the main focus. What Hemingway gives us here is also an imminent death scenario. On this occasion an old man is sitting by the side of the road at a bridge that will soon be taken by fascists during the Spanish Civil War. A Republican warns the old man that he is in danger if he decides to remain there. However, this old man has no purpose anymore, since he was forced to abandon the animals he used to take care of, which was his mission in life. Subsequently, he decides to stay, sitting there, in spite of a very likely death.

Again, the character has been stripped from his own life and has been condemned to keep living a life that is not his (Camus, *El mito* 157-162). Rather than running away from this coming death, he opts to stay there, doing absolutely nothing. In essence, what Hemingway shows us is practically the same outline for a story: a man that, once forced to live an inauthentic life, does not reclaim his destiny as his, that is, he does not own his life.

A different existentialist aspect can be seen in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", where a waiter understands the necessity of an old man, whose life is tragic, to stay until very late in the terrace of the café he works for since he finds it the only pleasant place to be. This waiter, unlike a younger waiter he works with, has nothing in life but this job, so he can understand the old fellow's loneliness. Once the old man is gone and the young waiter goes home, the older waiter has nothing else to do, so he goes to a bar only to eventually reassure his hatred for these places that are so different from his clean café.

This man fears something that he later resolves to identify as "nada". Everything is nothing for him. Nothing makes sense and nothing has meaning in life, which is a clear existential-nihilist statement. This waiter convinces himself to think he has insomnia and that this issue he has been thinking about must be a product of it. Actually, a further interpretation would make the reader see that even though the waiter realizes his life has no purpose, that it is utterly absurd and that nothingness reigns in him, he does not do anything about it and he gives up. The waiter had the perfect chance to enter the state of rebellion to reclaim his life and live authentically, but he decides not to do so, entering the category of coward man, just like the characters I previously mentioned.

Rebellion, sometimes also referred to as "revolt", is a moment in life where, having accepted that life is absurd, the individual does not get sad or apathetic, but he decides to give it a meaning of his own in order to regain the control of his own existence. This concept was introduced by Camus and it is fundamental to understand most existentialist approaches. Kierkegaard's man with earnest thoughts of death and Nietzsche's *Übermensch* are previous concepts that postulate the same idea.

The coward man existentialist archetype can also be seen in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", but this time with a major difference. Francis Macomber and his wife Margot travel to Africa to go on a safari guided by professional hunter Robert Wilson. During the safari, Macomber shows a pathetically pusillanimous attitude when a wounded lion charges him. This same lion is shot just in time by Wilson who is now seen by Margot as the alpha male, the "super masculine" man—a recurrent characteristic both in Hemingway's characters and his own life—which attracts Margot to the point they have intercourse that same night. Macomber is tremendously hurt by the infidelity. He starts to change his attitude once he kills buffalo the next day, which makes Margot realize confidence is awakening in her husband. At the end of the story, a fearless Macomber faces a charging buffalo, but just when he was about to be gored, he is murdered by his wife's accurate shot.

In my opinion, Macomber is a great example of the existential hero. A man whose masculinity and self-value have been taken away but eventually achieves redemption when he faces death—in the form of wild animals—without fear and determination. Macomber regains his life and makes it authentic. Much like Camus's *The Stranger*, Hemingway manages to portray a man that, under pressure and stress because of his imminent death, shows courage and integrity which derives in gaining a life worth living, even if it is for a brief moment. Both Camus's Meursault and Hemingway's Macomber die soon after their acts of rebellion.

"The Capital of the World" shows how Paco, a would-be bullfighter, travels from Extremadura to Madrid to start working at the Lúcar as a waiter. There he will find a string of pathetic has-been bullfighters riddled with flaws; there was an old-fashioned one, a sickly one, and, more importantly, a coward, since courage is the most important trait in a matador. Here, Paco, once the service is over, starts to perform some bullfighting moves with a napkin. The dishwasher, Enrique, showed him his gift at bullfighting with his apron. Unfortunately, he would be too scared to be a matador. Paco, who postulated that he would never be scared of such a thing for it was his biggest dream, suggested Enrique to make a performance where he would be a matador and the dishwasher would act as makeshift bull with a couple of knives.

Even though he was warned, Paco was terribly wounded and died shortly thereafter. Paco is definitely not a coward; he has the drive and the determination to become a bullfighter, but he lacks experience and ability. What the reader can see is the death of a person who is choosing his life, he is willing to do anything to accomplish his goal, which is a basic

element in existentialist matters. Paco is creating a meaning for his life and he will definitely not resign himself to be a waiter, which in existentialist terms could be interpreted as an inauthentic life. Unfortunately, he is killed by this fake bull; a pathetic end for a promising authentic life.

So far, Jesús has produced ample evidence of how, in different texts, characters confront tragedy and how they struggle to make meaning of their lives in spite of the ironies of their destiny. He has been able to particularize the idea of existentialism by observing the pattern of the characters' lives and locating it in their perseverance against adversity. Please, note that for his insightful comments he did not need to recur to criticism on Hemingway; he has been able to interpret the texts in a fluent manner because he has an aim in mind and has relied on his perceptions of the character's lives.

Remember that argumentative essays are not so much about filling the blanks of sections or headings such as: life, works, literary movements, etc. They are about pursuing and articulating a thought you think it is worth elaborating. You might find help along the way in the form of theories and criticism, but it is always you that has to do the walking, if you allow me the metaphor. At this point, Jesús takes up the opportunity to introduce a personal comment on Hemingway's hobbies. This may seem a digression at first sight, but it can also be understood as further reflection upon important ethical ideas closely connected with the topic of the essay. As Jesús notices, men often tend to justify their cruelty to other creatures by passing their acts off as courageous behavior:

Besides, Hemingway let us see that there is something interesting about the idea of cowardice and facing impending death, especially in his novel *Death in the Afternoon*. Hemingway's burning passion for bullfighting was no secret. Even though some people, including myself, cannot understand the enjoyment others get from witnessing bullfighting, Hemingway valued it as a magnificent artistic expression. Much of his passion comes from the idea of the matador confronting death face to face.

In order to further advance the idea of existentialism and to round off the essay, Jesús relates Hemingway's ideas of death to a well-known philosopher, thus tying up certain notions of death with the aforementioned idea of killing animals.

According to University of South Florida professor Jaimé L. Sanders, there are some interesting similarities between Ernest Hemingway and existentialism forefather Søren Kierkegaard when it comes to the study of death (Sanders 7). Both Kierkegaard and Hemingway were fascinated by the study of death as a way of discovering truth. The study of death has to take into account that death is the universal truth par excellence and that individuals must always remember that death is unavoidable. The importance of its study is crucial for the realization of the individual in the world. This study, despite involving a universal concern, must always be dealt from an embodied subjectivity because we, humans, do not die in the same way nor under the same circumstances. In this way, death is both

objective and subjective. In the end, the goal of the study both Kierkegaard and Hemingway postulate is to make us see death "clearly" and as a "whole". (Sanders 78)

In order to do so, we must accept that we will eventually die, that death is certain, but at the same time life is not predetermined, which renders the day a person dies totally unknown, that is, uncertain. The clash between certainty and uncertainty makes us see our death "clearly" and our life as a "whole" (Sanders 82). Both authors agree on the fact that this situation makes man feel courageous, which will allow him to live the rest of his life fully (Sanders 82). For Hemingway, the perfect scenario to show the uncertainty of death is the bullring.

The idea of cowardice and fear to death is a wrong perspective, a "mood", according to Kierkegaard (Sanders 85). Man should not fear death, for it means an inauthentic life, a concept that can also be seen in Camus' and Sartre's mindsets.

We are reaching the end of the essay. Jesús will keep on elaborating on the complex connotations around the idea of death from philosophical and literary angles. He will finally produce a conclusion in which the idea of existentialism has been satisfactorily spelled out. We have moved from the abstract to the concrete.

Note that citation is MLA 8TH edition.

Hemingway uses the spectacle of bullfighting and matadors to represent this idea. Great matadors, according to him, are those who show "pundonor", no fear, courage when they are facing a certainly uncertain potential death represented in the figure of the bull. The courage of the fearless matador in *Death in the Afternoon* can easily be extrapolated to Macomber's valor when confronting an African buffalo, which is essentially a pretty similar animal to bulls. This "pundonor" is directly connected to Kierkegaard's concept of "earnest" thoughts of death, which state pretty much the same (Sanders 85). Therefore, coward matadors cannot put on a good show because of their evident fear, which impacts their lives negatively (Sanders 86).

Thus, we can see a clear common pattern between Kierkegaard's approach to death and Hemingway's, as well as some similarities between the latter and his contemporaries Camus and Sartre. At the same time, Nietzsche's approach to the dynamics of how to live in order to have an authentic life can also be identified in Hemingway. Inferior men are defined by cowardice-alongside other traits-, whereas pride and courage are basic for the evolution from man to *Übermensch*, which in Hemingway's terms could be considered simply as a man who lives his life fully, a courageous man.

Consequently, one can affirm that Hemingway does follow and display the ideology of existentialism, or at least the key ideas of this philosophical tradition, throughout his literary production.

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“If you want to have a life that is worth living, a life that expresses your deepest feelings and emotions and cares and dreams, you have to fight for it.”

Alice Walker

5. Writing the paper

5.1. Beginnings and Endings

One way to start an essay is to focus on the characters’ struggle to get their dreams and the consequences of this struggle on their lives. In this case, Analía Herrera Salazar wished to consider how different notions of freedom led to conflict and frustration in a family of three African-American women. Their feelings and emotions were shaped by the ruling ideologies of the times, a moment in American history where the Civil Rights Movement was changing the ways people of different races defined themselves. Rather than tackling this issue from the deceiving simplicity of the white/black conflict, Analía wished to describe how traditional and revolutionary notions of self-worth and freedom clashed with each other. Racial issues cannot be separated from gender, class and education, and Alice Walker is often quoted to have said that “women have to be extremely careful about choosing something that they consider an act of defiance that can really be used to further their enslavement”.

This is how Analía started and finished her essay about Alice Walker’s short story “Everyday Use”. Please, bear in mind that both the introduction and the conclusion of any essay allow for a great amount of nuance and subtlety. They are not intended to be simple generalizations or repetitions of statements that may sound superficial or obvious. You have to transform the task of writing an essay into something that is meaningful to you; besides this, the more you know about your topic, the more this knowledge will enhance your critical thinking. Once you’ve written your first draft and have managed to write the body of the essay, you should be able to add an amount of complexity to your introduction in case you had already written it. You should also avoid being too general in your conclusion; just stating the topic of your essay again, without any further comment, will not do. Also, you want to go beyond the banality of saying things such as “I like or don’t like” something. As it is recommended on the writing center website that I quote below: “The conclusion pushes beyond the boundaries of the prompt and allows you to consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings.”

After the excerpts from Analía’s paper, you will read about how she fleshed out her proposal.

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"Heritage and Family Relations in 'Everyday Use'"

The first time I read "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker I was particularly surprised by its theme. What caught my attention was the portrayal of black women who are extremely different despite being part of the same family; there is a contrast between them that makes the story very fascinating. Men do not occupy a principal role, the plot is focused on the women and their struggles and desires.

A characteristic that really intrigued me was that Mama did not accept her role as the stereotype associated with women. She portrayed herself as a masculine figure that is proud of her strength. For this reason, the main focus of my essay is on these women, and on how each one of them copes with their situation. The main interest is on Mama, a woman that does not have a name but is the central character of the short story. The analysis is based on a particular element in the story, a quilt, a piece of fabric that gains a lot of importance as a metaphor of the role black women have had, or maybe have not had, in society.

Moreover, Dee's characteristics will also be analyzed in order to show how her attitude towards her family is the opposite of what she preaches. The differences between her and her sister, Maggie, will be assessed so that we can better understand the conclusion of the story. In short, I will try to articulate my thoughts in relation to what I identify to be the main themes of the novel: women, family relations, black heritage and the movements in defense of black people.

[...]

Conclusion

In conclusion, "Everyday Use" shows the struggles of black people fighting the treatment they received by mainstream white society and unearths the complexities involved within the Black community itself, where some people found it difficult to make sense of the ideas proclaimed by the Civil Rights Movement. Several movements appeared in the 1960s and, even though their ideas were directed at helping black people to achieve a better life, some of them did not completely accomplish their goals. Instead, they turned their back on their own people.

I think that Alice Walker used Maggie, Dee and Mama to represent the different perspectives that appeared in those years. She gave voice to black women who tried to understand themselves and their situation. From my perspective, this is very important since the set of beliefs that Alice Walker criticized ignored the mistreatment of women; those movements fought for black people's rights but women occupied a secondary position.

Nevertheless, each character contributed to change the situation of black people in their own way. While some of them protested and got into politics to make a change in the world, other preferred to live their lives showing that the stereotypes that were attributed to them were not true. Unfortunately, inequality still exists between white and black people, as well as between men and women.

As it is evident, each one of these characters cope with life in their own way and, from my point of view, all of them have something negative. As I see it, it is necessary to fight against injustice, but one must never forget your own roots and family; the difficulty lies in achieving the perfect balance.

[...]

A conclusion is not a summary. It should bring your essay to a close; it should clarify why your main argument is important. In order to do so, you may propose a solution or you may advance ideas for new fields of research. Also, you may question the limitations of your proposal, or that of other readers or critics. Try engaging your reader/reviewer by challenging them. In any case, the most important thing is that you do not repeat things you said before in your essay without adding nuance. Ponder on the consequences of your argument and help your reader gain a new perspective on the topic.

Here you will find some useful websites that offer tips to begin and to end essays.

“How to begin an essay: 13 engaging strategies” by Richard Nordquist.
<https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-begin-an-essay-1690495>

“Beginning the Academic Essay” by Patricia Kain, Harvard College Writing Center.
<https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/beginning-academic-essay>

“Introductions”. The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/introductions/>

“Conclusions”. The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/conclusions/>

These are some questions to Analía:

Did you face some difficulties when writing the essay? Any recommendations?

I always face difficulties when writing essays, sometimes it has to do with the essay itself, struggling with the main theme or not understanding it, but in this case it was the opposite. I had too many ideas and it was difficult to convey all that I had in mind. Sometimes, it can be hard to find a way to express yourself, and this is one of my main problems when I'm writing. Therefore, my main recommendation would be to plan what you want to say, and to have enough time to examine everything, because I know that one major problem for students is starting their essay too late and not paying attention to detail, a mistake that I always made.

How did you come to connect with Alice Walker's story?

There are several reasons why I think I connected with her work. Firstly, when we have to write an essay, specifically when we are told to write about a particular topic, we do not feel inspired or ecstatic to work on it. However, in this case we had to choose it among several options, which changed my approach to the story and made me more interested in it.

Secondly, I read many of the stories that we could pick, but hers made an impact on me because of the topic it dealt with. It was a story focused on women, on the struggles of being a black woman during the period of the Civil Rights Movement in America, and how that affected their family. I really enjoyed the metaphor of the quilt; I think that it is necessary to interpret things, to explore them by yourself, especially studying at university where you have to develop your critical thinking.

This story made me think a lot about my own ideas, because at first it made me think that I had to choose one perspective, Mama's or Dee's, because it seemed like there could only be one good option. However, at the conclusion I discovered that for me, nothing is black or white.

What did you learn about that period in America?

I learnt about important events in African American history that, without these classes, I may have never known because they are not what we usually study in high school. I did know about the Civil Rights Movement but just because of movies or other classes I took while at university. But, nowadays in blockbusters about this topic we are presented with strong characters that know what it is needed to achieve equality, for example, but I learnt that it was a period in which even the black people fighting for their rights had difficulties finding their right path in the movement. Not many movies show these discrepancies and prefer to show an idealized version.

“Young girls often feel strong, courageous, highly creative, and powerful until they begin to receive undermining sexist messages that encourage them to conform to conventional notions of femininity. To conform they have to give up power.”

(bell hooks, *Communion: The Female Search for Love*)

5.2. A Spark that illuminates a life

There are a number of possibilities to find an author that interests you, as literature written in English comes from most countries in the world. In this case, Concha Peñaranda Díaz decided to venture into the work of Nalo Hopkinson, a challenging writer born in Jamaica who has lived in Canada and in the USA. Hopkinson dissects the complexities of being a woman in the modern world by producing astonishing futuristic portraits of women in dystopian situations. Concha focuses on the ways we usually build our identities and how achieving an awareness of the available choices in our society makes us more critical towards the stereotypes that influence us. Her approach is initially sparked by Nalo Hopkinson's very words, which support Concha's argument:

“Nalo Hopkinson's *Skin Folk: A Matter of Multifaceted Identity*”

Throughout the Caribbean, under different names, you'll find stories about people who aren't what they seem. Skin gives these skin folk their human shape. When the skin comes off, their true selves emerge. They may be owls. They may be vampiric balls of fire. And always, whatever the burden their skins bear, once they remove them—once they get under their own skins—they can fly. It seemed an apt metaphor to use for these stories collectively. (Nalo Hopkinson 1)

This essay represents an approach to Nalo Hopkinson and her multidimensional way to deal with identity in her short story collection *Skin Folk*. My essay will start from a personal angle, as I consider this to be necessary to go beyond every story and at the same time to feel it “under my skin”. Additionally, I will try to analyse some of the most remarkable characteristics of the author concerning her background and the way these characteristics are present in the fifteen short stories that comprise the book.

The Jamaican-born Nalo Hopkinson shakes our consciences on pre-established beliefs, and her magical but realistic writing engages us in an imaginary universe where everything is possible and nothing is what it seems to be; there are identities beyond their skin (Nelson 2002). She introduces us into different worlds that lie beneath a false normality, fantasy, evils, spirits in the earth that protect us or, on the contrary, destroy us. Devils who suck the soul of babies or who appropriate a young girl's will; mythological creatures that settle

in a woman's body, filling her mental emptiness; common people whose skin hides terrifying personalities. We are given the two sides of the same coin: who are we and who is the person by our side? angel or demon?... maybe none of them.

[...]

According to Farooq Kperogi, the term "skin folk" was coined by an African-American folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston: it is a "Black English expression for members of one's race which pretends to say that there is more to friendship and affinity than mere racial similarity." So, if we bear in mind this definition and we take into consideration the issues tackled throughout the book, we believe that the narratives in it engage with the author's background through issues related to cultural identity and social attitudes, and that these issues affect current generations of peoples who come from colonized communities in the Caribbean. So, we find hints of postcolonialism in the way these characters are introduced to us and in their ways to adjust to white society and to create processes of personal transformation, as it happens, for example, in the story "Something to Hitch Meat to" (23). What is more, some of these stories provoke a kind of awakening from lethargy, which triggers a personal vindication of their ancestral backgrounds, that is to say, a match between current society and the inherited wisdom from their ancient culture. Jamaican legends are blended with normal lives in a modern country, Canada, as we notice, for instance, in 'And the Lillies-them a-blow' (203).

[...]

After this preparatory contextualization, Concha goes on to describe the specific features of each of the identities that appear in this short story collection. She relates them to modes of colonial thinking and also to those of Indigenous communities. She provides some examples:

Let's focus on the multifaceted identity provided by *Skin Folk* in a more detailed way, pointing to those features that have very especially drawn my attention. To begin with, we deal with the hiding of real desires. We assume that "Riding the Red" is a remake of the children's tale "Little Red Riding Hood", but instead of creating another modern adult version of the story; the tale focuses on the grandmother's identity, she is the real protagonist of the story. She is described as an experienced woman who tries to do her best in order to prepare her granddaughter for her adulthood, and she warns her about "the dangers in the forest with the wolf", that is to say, real life. Granma is the ancient little red riding hood that narrates what happens once the tale ends: years later the little girl finds a nice man, marries him and becomes the model of a goodwife. What surprises us most is that grandma's past conceals a different reality and a different personality, precisely not that of the sweet and quiet old granny of the traditional fable. In conversations with her daughter, grandmother expresses herself with nostalgic words, words that show a passionate relationship with 'wolfie', as she calls him with affection. However, in the end, she did what she was expected to do, that is, convention finally crushed forbidden desire.

Other kinds of identities seem to spring from the legacy of colonialism and the way it reshaped Caribbean personality. Colonialism of the mind and of the body bear an impact on other characters, who have come to live in developed countries like Canada, the second home country of Nalo Hopkinson (Mambrol). The two short stories that, in my opinion, contribute most to highlight these features are "Something to Hitch Meat to", in which the author makes use of Caribbean folklore and "A Habit of Waste", a science fiction story set in current times. In the first story, the conversation between Arto and the little girl reveals the importance of an authentic self in every individual, the self being represented by a skeleton, helping the character to remember who he is and, in consequence, allowing him to find his right place in a "first world country", in which he is treated as an immigrant with all the negative connotations that the status implies. In "A Habit of Waste", the protagonist is a creole whose family comes from Jamaica and lives in Toronto. Because of her insecurity and what she thinks Caribbean identity means in the modern society, Cynthia rejects her background by changing her appearance from Black to Caucasian. But she happens to come across the woman who has bought her previous body, a body that this woman wears with pride and self-assurance, and this makes her ponder on her previous definition of beauty. She now admires the worth and courage of that anonymous woman who took pride in being black.

Nalo Hopkinson tackles feminism identity rewriting African and Caribbean legends that are blended with stories that take place nowadays. Good examples of this hybridity are "Money Tree", "Slow Cold Chick", or "Precious". These narratives seem to have in common their characters' inner struggles, their confusion and disappointment with their own lives and their subconscious desire to break chains. Silky in "Money Tree" will delve into her past and her tumultuous personal life by remembering her link towards her selfish brother, who is supposedly dead. Water is represented by the Jamaican river, River Mumma, a place that the character associates with her mother and her brother. Water is the means by which she tries to commit suicide but as a result, she seems to be reborn to a new life. Blaise in "Slow Cold Chick" is shown to us as a timid young woman admiring the lives of her neighbours in silence. Her life changes drastically when she finds herself as the owner of a mythological creature, a cockatrice, which will make her develop an unknown courage to face awkward situations. The outcome of the story brings about the emergence of a new powerful woman, this time unashamedly proud of herself.

[...]

Once Concha has written a well-wrought overview of the stories contained in Hopkinson's *Skin Folk*, she proceeds to write her conclusion. In it, she relates the knowledge she has gained to an appreciation of the twofold nature of postcolonial societies:

On the whole, Nalo Hopkinson gives us a varied view of what nation, race and language mean for current generations of peoples that come from the Caribbean. Hers is an innovative literature and, by means of fantasy and science-fiction, she introduces us to a universe where the authentic individual emerges out of superficial skins. This writer conquers our

minds and souls with her amazing imagination and originality, traits that she mixes with a profound knowledge of her Caribbean background. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie talked about the double perspective innate to those who have been raised in the shadow of "mother countries", countries who lied beyond the ocean and to which later on they had to move as migrants or exiles. Nalo Hopkinson is capable of writing with that double perspective, both as an insider and outsider, since she owns the psychology, experience and language of her birthplace and is able to dissect, from that particular perspective, the rules of capitalist societies belonging to allegedly more developed countries than hers, such as the USA or Canada.

She brings us the past, present and future of Jamaican history. And the core in all of these stories seems to be timeless: every skin hides another skin completely different from what it appears to be, sometimes so scary and real that fiction seems to be part of a real present. Nalo Hopkinson expands our imagination in unpredictable ways and makes us find ourselves while entering the skin of others.

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“You never really understand a person until you consider things from their point of view...

Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”

(Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*)

5.3. Being on the Watch-out for Details

Some students choose a topic because they feel some kind of attraction for a writer and for his or her writings. This seduction may have to do with a component of mystery, or it may have to do with the atmosphere the writer creates. That was the case of Sara Paniagua Ortega with Edgar Allan Poe. She decided to explore further what she experienced when she read Poe by looking into the details of one of his stories. Sara embarked on the adventure of finding in the text what made her feel that way.

First, you will read the beginning of Sara’s essay so that you can appreciate how she collects the clues that will lead her to consider Poe’s strategies of characterization. Then, you will be presented with another part of Sara’s essay in which she attempts to understand the story “Berenice” by looking beyond her own impressions. She looks for answers in the knowledge drawn from genres such as the grotesque and complements her essay with a well-chosen piece of criticism that sheds light on her ideas.

“Making Meaning Out of ‘Berenice’”

Poe has a kind of disturbing fantasy which has always fascinated and influenced me. Through his writing we can see the power of the mind and the imagination. He sets a challenge to the readers in which we have to, in a way, reveal the hidden meaning behind the words and the images. It feels like reality is something we have to decipher through the scattered but connected clues through the narrative. We enter and play his game, and our mind thanks him for the effort since our mind likes to decode and interpret things; it is such a good exercise.

The aim of this essay is to try to explain how we can create meaning out of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “Berenice” by looking at some of its characteristics, namely the fantastic and the grotesque. For that, I will have in mind the power of each reader’s imagination to fill the voids and the effort the readers need to make in order to construct the meaning of the whole short story.

My idea was to consider everything said in the text, from the epigraph until the last line, so as to explore every hint provided by Poe with the hope that my investigation would lead me to find out how he had foreshadowed the story’s outcome from the very beginning. Also, how we should understand what may seem inexplicable, bearing in mind a number of dimensions: our real world, the real world created in the text, the dream-world, and the rules each world has.

Firstly, we read short stories in one go and, when we do so, we are fully immersed in the text; there is no external disturbance in the reading. From my point of view, this increases our uncertainty of what happens in the text, especially in the first reading, when we do not know what to expect from it. It feels as if our brain, in such short period of reading time, did not have the time to process and to give an explanation to what we have read. In order to fully understand the plot, we ought to re-read it since the first time we are not able to grasp all the meaning or all the hints the author gives us so that we can realise what is going on in the text.

In "Berenice", we know that Egaeus has a disorder, which he calls "monomania", which makes him analyse everything compulsively, "even the most ordinary objects of the universe" (357). When we first read it, we believe that this disorder is not that bad because analysing things is not something to be afraid of, and it is not until the end that we are tricked and shocked. It is on a second reading when we get all the hints in the narrative, and these show the extreme effects of this obsession on Egaeus, which not even himself can explain: "The undue, earnest, and morbid attention [...]" "[...] for that exercise of that intense and abnormal meditation whose nature I have been at some trouble explaining [...]" (358-359).

In addition, when we re-read it, we discover that, as the narrative evolves, we can fully understand all the hints of Egaeus's obsession towards Berenice and we realise in advance how the story ends once we recollect those hints: "and I had seen her [...] as an abstraction [...] to analyse - not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse [...] speculation" (359-360).

I saw them now even more unequivocally than I beheld them then. The teeth! -the teeth! - they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; [...] Then came the fully fury of my monomania, and I struggled in vain against its strange and irresistible influence. In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. (361)

This passage illustrates his obsession with her teeth, which ends with him pulling them out and keeping the thirty-two pieces in a box. If we had understood all the hints in the first reading, we would have guessed that, as Egaeus has an obsession disorder which he has projected on the teeth, he would attempt to analyse them more closely, and a way of doing this is to pull them out.

[...]

In addition to this, we need to keep in mind that "Berenice" is also a fantastic text, with some grotesque thrown in, and, as I see it, this genre fits the form of the short story very well. In the fantastic and the grotesque, we can find elements that are difficult to explain, and the reader may use his imagination to make meaning out of them.

When Berenice appears in front of Egaeus in a ghost-like form, we are faced again with the problem of making meaning. How do we understand this situation and creature? It is a dream or it is something real? Let's analyse the passage to find some explanations.

When she appears, he questions what is happening: "[...] Was it my own excited imagination-or the misty influence of the atmosphere-or the uncertain twilight of the chamber [...] that caused in it so vacillating and indistinct an outline? I could not tell" (360). He does not really know whether what he is seeing is part of his imagination or part of his reality. In this passage, Egaeus wants to know what she really is, "a consuming curiosity pervaded my soul" (360), he says, and such a curiosity also pricks us, so to speak, since we want to be able to understand what has happened.

From all that, we can infer that Berenice has been described from the perspective of the grotesque, as we cannot really understand what she is. As Jeffrey Deshell points out: "With the grotesque non-thing, however, reference to other things is always negative and unstable; we don't know what it is, we can only say what is not [...], and we don't know how it relates to other things in the world because we don't know what category it belongs to" (55). Jeffrey Deshell believes that the grotesque has the quality of ambiguity and ambivalence and, as such, it can have more than one meaning or interpretation. From my point of view, this means every one of us interprets it in a way because there is not a fixed way so as to interpret and understand it.

Taking into account the above, we may think the creature is real but there is something which catches our attention: "The shutting of a door disturbed me, and, looking up, I found my cousin had departed from the chamber" (361). We could think that Egaeus had been dreaming and that everything was part of his unconscious; and that the shutting of the door woke him up and, as a consequence, the creature disappeared.

So, what happened was real or was it a dream? If it is, indeed, real, do we understand this short story by our reality rules or do we create new rules for it?

[...]

From this point on, Sara attempts to answer these questions, and she responds by using the knowledge she has from narratives in general, from the grotesque, and from the short story genre. We wish to leave the article here, on a sort of suspenseful point so that you can figure out how you would end the essay yourself.

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Sara is very fond of writing, and I would like to ask her a couple of questions about the connections between writing for artistic purposes and writing for academic purposes.

Is writing a story very different from writing an essay?

They are similar in the sense that, when you are about to write something, the first thing that comes to your mind is an idea. Then, from that little idea, you start to do some research to develop it in depth and, finally, you start writing; and that is where they depart from each other.

For me, the main difference and an obvious one between the two is the language used. An essay demands for a stricter use of the language, the so-called "academic language", which limits the creativity of the academic. On the other hand, as said in the previous point, stories let the creativity of the writer explode, it is freer. Of course, you can make use of metaphors and other literary devices in essays to explain your message, but the goal is different from that of a story. In essays, the main goal is to spread knowledge, whereas a story can have multiple goals and this goal can differ from writer to writer.

What recommendations would you give to other students who find it difficult to write essays?

If you are unsure about what to write, just keep your topic simple and don't try to bite more than you can chew. In other words, there are going to be times, especially in college, where the topic you will have to write about is not going to be of your taste or you may not have many ideas to develop, so the best thing you can do is to choose one or two strong arguments and continue through that. In relation to that, be confident in your own ideas because they are as valid as those of academics published in books.

The other recommendation, and the most important for me, is that you don't need to use complicated language. Sometimes it is better to keep it more standard. The goal in academic writing is to make the knowledge accessible to everyone, not to show off with as many complicated words as you can fit into one big sentence. When I write an essay, I always ask to myself: if someone who is not in the academic world was to read it, would they be able to understand everything? If the answer is no, then I re-write it to make it clearer and more approachable. When someone has to re-read an academic text more than twice to understand the message, then your writing is not as good as you think it is.

“As you start to walk on the way, the way appears”

Yalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī

5.4. Pursuing an unusual thought: A full essay

How to start writing an essay? First and most important, you have to read carefully the text you will discuss in your assignment. Read very especially for the details, not only for the general characteristics. Of course, you have to consider what may be obvious on a first reading, but you also have to read for that which you do not know or do not understand well yet, paying attention to the effects of the text on you, to the images that the text creates in your mind. Collect all this information about your own approach before you gather information from other sources. Do not expect to find all the answers before you start writing. The answers to your initial questions will come, if they do, when you write and revise the essay several times. If you think you have it all sorted out at the beginning, it may be because you are only focusing on the obvious.

Read what Janire Martínez Sarrías wrote when she decided to write her essay on Emily Dickinson’s poetry. Note that the structure of her essay is more organic and fitting to her topic than the trite formula: summary of author’s life + plot summary + description of characters + a general statement as a way of conclusion. Janire chose one of the poems we had not discussed in class and she focused on just one line of that poem. She kept in mind her impressions of other poems by Dickinson she had read and, very importantly, she managed to connect her first idea with the wider knowledge of literature she had acquired in her studies so far. The full essay is included here; I will be interrupting it, as usual, to point out some of its characteristics.

“An Exploration of the Brain in Emily Dickinson's Poetry”

“The brain is wider than the sky”. So begins one of Emily Dickinson's most well-known poems. When I first read it, as one of the course's compulsory readings, what struck me most was the use of “brain” instead of “mind” or “soul”, which are more commonly associated with poetry. She had opted for a much more anatomical term. As I began to deepen into her work, I learned that death was the most prominent theme in her poems, nearly always revolving around macabre motifs. But it was her treatment of these themes that captured my interest. In class, we were told that, in her writing, Dickinson is aiming at defining a feeling that she cannot verbalize and quite a few of her poems, I found, illustrate feelings typical of those who are battling mental illness. The topic of creative people and madness has always intrigued me. But, until now, all our attempts at psychoanalytic literary criticism have been based on sexual complexes, such as, for instance, the Freudian reading of *Hamlet* we were assigned to carry out last year. We have certainly come a long way since the fifties and sixties, when Freud's theory of psychoanalysis was in its heyday, and society is becoming more and more educated in mental health. Terms like anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder are now familiar to us. Thus, for my essay, I've decided to explore the mental condition of the speaker in Emily Dickinson's poems. To do so, I will draw parallels between the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's

short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the speaker in Dickinson's "They shut me up in Prose". Then, I will analyse a poem that has often been quoted as evidence of the poet's interest in the mind and the demons that can haunt it: "One need not be a Chamber to be Haunted". And, to finish, I will make reference to studies conducted by renowned authors which may validate, or challenge, my own perspective.

Once Janire explains the origin of the central idea of her essay, she starts to collect evidence that can illustrate and back up her idea:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman published her "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 1892, that is, little more than a decade after Dickinson's death. This semi-autobiographical short story could shed some light on the socio-cultural context in which Emily Dickinson produced the entire body of her poetry and deepen our understanding of it and of her mindset. "The Yellow Wallpaper" follows a young woman's descent into madness after she has been prescribed inactivity and seclusion as treatments for her hysteria. This gothic tale, while being mainly a testament to the state of mind of the protagonist, also offers a description of the "madness" around her. In an interview with *The Forerunner*, in 1913, Charlotte Perkins Gilman spoke about her own personal experience with the Victorian "rest-cure".

I went [...] to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. [...] he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to live as domestic a life as far as possible, to have but two hours' intellectual life a day, and never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again as long as I lived. I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over. (Perkins Gilman 1913, 271)

The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is diagnosed with "a slight hysterical tendency", but she is more likely suffering from postpartum depression. In the late nineteenth century, doctors didn't recognize such illnesses and didn't take a woman's mental health very seriously either, which often resulted in misdiagnosis. Perkins Gilman clarifies that her intent in writing her short story was to protest this treatment of women like herself and increase conversation and awareness surrounding mental illness.

I have found that both her terrifying short story and Emily Dickinson's allegorical poem "They shut me up in Prose" present the literary imagination as capable of unbinding the social, domestic, and psychological confinements of a nineteenth-century woman writer (Johnson 1989, 522).

Janire has firmly established the connections between the way the two writers express the urges of their imagination. Now she goes on to justify her intuition textually. Note that she has not abandoned her initial line of questioning and that she provides plenty of examples, that is, she has provided textual evidence. (For the poems, see appendix A and B below).

In the first stanza, the speaker describes a mysterious "They" as trying to limit her to writing in "Prose". Since "Prose" is capitalized, it probably stands for a whole belief system. But, what does "They shut me up in Prose" really mean? Most likely, that society tried to shut the speaker away by prohibiting her from writing poetry, perhaps because this genre is more open and free. In the following verse, she talks about her childhood. She says that, as a child, she was put in a closet because they liked her "still". The fact that she capitalizes her gender in "little Girl" makes this poem more likely to be interpreted as a predicament of the female artist. In the second and third stanzas, the speaker establishes a comparison between her "Brain" and a "Bird" that will be maintained throughout the entire poem. She mocks their futile efforts to silence her ideas, saying that it would be as foolish as imprisoning a bird in a pound for treason. It "has but to will" to free itself from its captivity, for it can simply fly out of the pound. The speaker can break out of her metaphorical prison with similar ease. If those who tried in vain to pin down her thoughts had "peeped" and "seen her brain go round", they would have seen that there is no way to contain or control what she thinks. Moreover, the captivity imposed on her body actually freed her mind. By trying to keep the speaker captive, they only inflamed her imagination.

Please, note that Janire takes into consideration the effects of Dickinson's words on her hypothetical readers and remains observant of all the textual details in order to make her statements sound and reliable. Once she has done this, she moves on to the other text, and she transitions from Dickinson into Perkins through comparison.

The protagonist of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is likewise secluded in a nursery room and expressly forbidden to write, but she rebels against her husband and sister-in-law: "I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal-having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition" (648). Emily Dickinson herself lead a life of seclusion, though hers was voluntary. The poet had little interaction with the outside world, save regular correspondence with a few of her favoured friends, and spent most of her adult life confined to a single room. There, she focused on her writings and spread her wings by pouring her thoughts onto the page. As the speaker in her poem, perhaps Dickinson too retreated into her own brain, where she found a reality equal to or greater than that of the material world (Leiter 2007, 18; 203-204).

"One need not be a Chamber to be Haunted" is one of the finest examples I've found of Emily Dickinson's fascination with the horrors hiding within our own brains. Dickinson states her argument in the very first stanza. She writes "The brain has corridors surpassing / Material place". Or, to put it another way, it contains a space infinitely larger than any tangible place and which exists on a plane different from the physical one. However, the speaker in the poem compares her brain to several building structures throughout the poem, being referred to as a house, an abbey and an apartment. And all of these places are haunted-as is her brain. The lonesome corridors of her mind are riddled

with "spectres" far more terrifying than any "External Ghost". The speaker illustrates the effects of her madness by comparing the demons lurking in the depths of her brain to fearful beings from the real world, such as a horseman or an assassin. But what is most interesting about this poem is the allusion to the phenomenon of the multiplicity of self.

While Janire is diving deeper and deeper into the intricacies of the relationship between mind and madness, she creates some amount of suspense through an allusion, thus introducing another element that will enrich her interpretation: the multiplicity of the self. In order to support her argument, she now draws from the field of psychological studies applied to the study of literature. Janire continues to say that

The speaker tells us that we would be better off to face all earthly foes than the "Ourself, behind ourself concealed". Here, we can hear echoes of Freud's theories about the unconscious, the name given to those parts of our own mind which we scarcely understand and where our darkest fears and desires are located. Emily Dickinson made her inner world the major field of exploration in her poetry. She was a mental traveller and, thus, her poems are like reports of her terrifying journeys.

So far, we have established that the enigmatic poet lived in an age where mental illness was poorly treated and diagnosed, and that she chose to spend much of her life in voluntary isolation. One of the greatest poets of inwardness, Dickinson explores her own psyche in several of her poems. These reveal her as someone troubled by her "self" and who may be struggling with psychological illness. Since the connection between Dickinson supposed "madness" and her poems has long been a subject of interest, I will now cite some authors who have carried out research about this topic, arriving at very interesting conclusions. In "Emily Dickinson Revisited: A Study of Periodicity in Her Work", professor John F. McDermott argued that the poet had a bipolar trait. He found that Dickinson had mood swings that shifted with the seasons, being more prolific during the spring and summer and less in the winter. McDermott says, "One can speculate she had winter blues or depression, but at the same time, in the spring and summer, she had a flash of creative energy [...] She had a change in mood, a cognitive change" (qtd. in Vedantam 2001).

Extreme fluctuations in mood characterized by mania and flashes of creative energy on one end and depression and hopelessness on the other are associated with bipolar disorder. This would also explain the changes of mood and tone from one poem to the next, ranging from gloomy and desolate to playful or even humorous and depending on how she feels at a given moment. Nonetheless, McDermott points out that "There is a spectrum from a bipolar trait to the illness. People at the level of bipolar illness are not creative. They are disorganized, they are psychotic [...] My speculation is she had a bipolar trait". If McDermott is right, the poet became "enlightened" during the manic phases of her mood swings while still maintained the ability to convey her thoughts with literary brilliance (qtd. in Vedantam 2001). But perhaps the "I" in her poems does not stand for the poet herself.

As you can see here, Janire does not just aid herself with certain scholarly interpretations, in this case McDermott's conclusions, and lets it stay at that. She questions his conclusions and keeps searching for answers, she keeps questioning. By doing so, she is performing the activity of essay writing as a documented and personal search for deeper meanings. She uses relevant critical material as well as avoids copying and pasting the opinion of some experts. Additionally, she does not let her own voice be suffocated by scholarly jargon. She is doing proper research by always keeping in mind what she is looking for, without being distracted by the ideas or intentions predominating in the essays she draws from.

In one of the letters addressed to her mentor, T. W. Higginson, Dickinson wrote, "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse—it does not mean—me—but a supposed person" (Johnson and Ward, 1958: L268). Scholar Virginia Jackson suggests that Dickinson's poetry may not as honestly confessional as we think and that, like many other writers, she might have fabricated personae which enabled her to play different roles. In fact, the dominant reading of Dickinson's poems today is as a series of performances by fictional speakers (Jackson 39, 131-133). While we generally remind ourselves to differentiate between the author and the voice or persona of a poem, there seems to be a tendency to merge the two when discussing Dickinson. Since I am approaching the end of this composition, I think that it is time now to ask myself: What have I learned from writing this essay?

Now comes the time for the conclusion. After this trajectory of: 1. enquiry, 2. documentation and 3. interpretation, Janire will attempt to answer the questions that pricked her mind and that originated her essay. She discards clichéd answers, usually given, in the case of Dickinson, with reference to her biography, and attempts to warn gullible readers against a too smug or unnuanced identification between artistic genius and mental illness.

Dickinson's poetry has been "particularly vulnerable to narrative explanation, specifically to biographical explication" (Bloom 62). The cryptic nature of her poems and the eccentricity surrounding her character have fascinated and puzzled many, including myself. But some have found answers to their unresolved questions by interweaving her poems with the very few unreliable facts about her life, thus treating Dickinson's biography as "the overarching narrative that ties her poetry together" (Harris 44). The result is often a too simplistic reading in which her poems become extensions of Dickinson herself, who is reduced to a romanticised stereotype. Over and above that, the tendency to diagnose the deceased poet with various psychological conditions. Looking for symptoms of her supposed mental illness in her poems is highly speculative and shows disregard for the multivalent nature of her poetic voice.

If there is any lesson to be drawn from this essay is that Dickinson's poems are "too rich in implication, too subject to multiple interpretations, to function as reliable proof [for her probable abnormal mental state]" (Hirschhorn and Longworth 300) and that the

association of mental disorders with creative people, the linking genius and madness, leads to a dangerous romantization of mental illness, for most people struggling with mental health related illnesses are tormented and dysfunctional, not great artists.

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McDermott, John F. "Emily Dickinson Revisited: A Study of Periodicity in Her Work." *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 158, 2001, pp. 686-690.

Schöberlein, Stefan. "Insane in the Membrane: Emily Dickinson Dissecting Brains". *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2015, pp. 46-70.

Otten, Thomas J. "Emily Dickinson's Brain: On Lyric and the History of Anatomy." *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, 2005, pp. 57-83.

Appendix A

They shut me up in Prose -
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet -
Because they liked me "still" -

Still! Could themselves have peeped -
And seen my Brain - go round -
They might as well have lodged a Bird
For Treason - in the Pound -

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down upon Captivity -
And laugh - No more have I -

Appendix B

ONE need not be a chamber to be haunted,
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.

Far safer, of a midnight meeting
External ghost,
Than an interior confronting
That whiter host.

Far safer through an Abbey gallop,
The stones achase,
Than, moonless, one's own self encounter
In lonesome place.

Ourself, behind ourself concealed,
Should startle most;
Assassin, hid in our apartment,
Be horror's least.

The prudent carries a revolver,
He bolts the door,
O'erlooking a superior spectre
More near.

6. Before You Read, Before You Write: Useful Tips

The following are recommendations you may bear in mind when you are reading a literary text and when you are writing about it. In another section, chapter 8, you will find some guidelines to self-assess your work. All these tips can help you organize your work adequately when trying to meet the academic standards of essay writing.

Observe, think, interpret, write

Please, take these tips into consideration BEFORE you read the texts or watch the films and also BEFORE writing the first draft of your essay.

1. **First**, you need to develop an awareness of the basic research processes:
 1. You will have to read the story, poem, or novel carefully, taking notes of your findings. The same applies to films.
 2. Create an argument. An essay is not a compilation of scattered ideas. It is not either a paraphrase of plot or a description of obvious characteristics. You need an aim and an outline.
 3. You will have to consider the relevance or lack of relevance of the information you have gathered. Discard any material that does not advance your argument. Do not include the author's biography if that information does not have any connection with the ideas you wish to discuss.
 4. Use an ethics of personal effort. Avoid plagiarism.
2. **Second**, try to develop your own critical thinking strategies. Make the most out of your personal reading, take some time revising your own perceptions and insights. Each essay you write will help you develop critical skills in very productive ways.

If you deem it necessary, use secondary sources (criticism on the topic or on the text you are analyzing), but these sources have to be integrated into your own analysis. Your professor will assess how you think, and that will not be possible if you use the "copy and paste" method. Trust your own potential and elaborate your own ideas in a cogent manner.

Avoid:

- a) Paraphrasing.
- b) Unnuanced plot summary.
- c) Random and/or unconnected comments.
- d) Plagiarism (word-for-word, patchwork paraphrase, etc.).¹

Strive

to create original ideas and to express them as cogent argumentation.

3. And **third**, carefully **PROOFREAD** your paper. In order to do this properly, wait for some time before you do so. Then, take the position of an external reader, try to distance yourself from your previous role as a writer.

Watch out!

Plagiarism is intellectual burglary, that is, it is an act where the writer uses the words and ideas of another person or source and presents them as his or her own. Plagiarism is also passing off as new or original an idea which in fact was found in an existing source.

We can borrow, but not steal. Whenever you write something that is a reproduction, a summary, or a paraphrase, you have to include the original source of this information. That way, your reviewer will be able to assess how you have integrated that information into your own writing and how you have pushed ideas forward. We must always document or credit our sources when we reproduce them literally or partially, when we paraphrase, summarize, comment, etc. Knowledge is about building on the work of others, we take previous perceptions and understandings to a new stage or to other directions. Therefore, rather than presenting the work of others as your own, you should strive to make your own contribution to the state of the matter, however little it may appear to you. Doing this, you will be truly learning and allowing professors to properly assess your work. Assessing your work involves a consideration of the academic quality and originality of your submission as well as of your ethical standards.

Thus, please, make sure to adequately acknowledge your sources both in your text and in the Works Cited section of your essay. **Most importantly: note that a list of cited works at the end of your essay is not enough acknowledgement, you have to reference your sources every time you use them in your essay using parenthetical citations.** Otherwise it will be considered plagiarism. In the next chapter you will find a guide to in-text citation and to the creation of a Works Cited page.

¹ Patchwork paraphrase is formed by material copied from one or several original sources that appears totally or partially unacknowledged. These copied words and/or ideas are juxtaposed with the words that belong to the student or writer that is copying or paraphrasing and that, therefore, is presenting all, most or some of the material as his or her own.

*The following sites have been selected because they offer good guides to essay writing. They also give some practical advice on how to avoid plagiarism, especially in connection to paraphrasing. Check them out if necessary:

https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

<https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/overview-academic-essay>

https://www.internationalstudent.com/essay_writing/essay_tips/

<http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/writing/how-to-write-an-essay.html>

*Besides the sample papers written by students at the University of La Rioja, here you will find further examples of essays on literature in a range of topics.

<https://www.ukessays.com/services/example-essays/english-literature/>

<http://www.unm.edu/~aobermei/Eng200/samplepapers/>

<http://www.essaybyexample.com/free-essay-samples/english-lit-essays.php>

<https://www.thinkib.net/englishalanglit/page/8362/sample-essays>

7. Citing

In this chapter you will learn how to quote the bibliographical sources you use in the text of your essay (in-text citation) and how to prepare the section called “Works Cited” that is included at the end of any essay.

There are several standardized formats for quoting bibliographical resources in an academic essay and also for preparing a “Works Cited” section with the bibliography you have used in the essay. The best-known are MLA, Chicago Manual of Style and the APA. It would be advisable to become familiar with at least one style. In this book we opt for the MLA citing style because it is widely used in literary criticism and in academic journals about literature. We will be mainly using the last edition, the 8th, of MLA citation style, although take note that the 7th edition is still extensively used. Below is a summary of the most common situations in citation.

In-text citation. The basics

1) Enclose short quotations within double quotation marks. Short quotations are up to four lines. Punctuation marks should go after the parenthetical citation. Examples:

 Their faces are turned to the open sea, “strangers every one of them, though he felt they knew him. That he was known to them somehow” (Crummey 264).

 Ilka Saal insightfully notes that when translating a wound into narrative, at stake are important questions “with regard to what kind of narrative perspectives, structures and tropes we ultimately deploy to render the ineffable fathomable” (453).

2) Quotations longer than four lines should go in a block without quotation marks. They are called block quotations or blockquotes. Left margin indentation is usually 1,27 cm. You can change the font size of the blockquote, although this is not considered necessary. For example:

 Tragedy itself is presented as a flood of light that dazzles her, leaving people and objects around her forever altered after her husband’s drowning:

 A blanket of white was aglitter out there. Magnificent and frigid and light-spangled. As long as she lives Helen will never forget how beautiful the snow was, and the sky, and how it flooded her and she couldn’t tell the beauty apart from the panic.

She decided then, and still believes, that beauty and panic are one and the same.
(Moore 271)

3) Other situations

- When you are citing poetry, try to keep the original format of the poem and mark the breaks of the lines with a slash (/) and a space before and following the slash.
- When you are omitting one or some words from the original, you can use three periods, or square brackets with three periods:

“Without a gust of warning, chaos had blustered in on the wind ... the ocean became one and eclipse the two human specks in the speck of a boat that had dared to venture forth” (70).

Please, note that in this latter example the author of the text is known by the reader and that is the reason why it is not included in the parenthesis. If no previous mention to the author has been made, you would have to say: (Harvey 70).

- If you have a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks inside double quotation marks.

Please, note that both in your text and in the works cited section, the title of novels is italicized and the title of short stories goes in quotation marks.

Most university libraries offer summaries of citation styles on their webpages. The following diagram is taken from a web resource at the university of Pittsburg (USA). It has been selected because it enables you to see the rules at a glance.

<https://pitt.libguides.com/c.php?g=12678&p=67010>

Material Type	In-text Citation
Author's name in text	Magny develops this argument (67-69).
Author's name in reference	This argument has been developed elsewhere (Magny 67-69).
Two authors' names in reference	The most notorious foreign lobby in Washington is the "Sugar Mafia" (Howe and Trott 134).
Quotation found in indirect or "secondhand" source	The philosopher Alain states that "admiration is not pleasure but a kind of attention. . ." (qtd. in Magny 66).

Preparing a Works Cited section

With MLA style, you must include a Works Cited page at the end of your paper. A Works Cited page is an alphabetical listing of the resources cited in your paper. The following is a sample of 8th edition works cited page from Purdue Own Writing Lab (Purdue University). It includes additional sources and examples for the sake of clarity.

Articles in online magazines, online newspapers, online academic journals and databases

- Dean, Cornelia. "Executive on a Mission: Saving the Planet." *The New York Times*, 22 May 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/05/22/science/earth/22ander.html?_r=0. Accessed 29 May 2019.
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- Shulte, Bret. "Putting a Price on Pollution." *US News & World Report*, vol. 142, no. 17, 14 May 2007, p. 37. *Ebsco*, Access no: 24984616.

Articles in print journals

- Gowdy, John. "Avoiding Self-organized Extinction: Toward a Co-evolutionary Economics of Sustainability." *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2007, pp. 27-36.
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*Note that for repeated entries (an author with two or more references), the author's name is replaced by three dashes plus a period.

Artwork (painting, sculptures, photographs)

Boudin, Eugene. *On the Beach, Sunset*. 1865. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*,
www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438551

Goya, Francisco. *The Family of Charles IV*. 1800, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

(If you have viewed the artwork online, include the website after this information)

Books (one, two or three or more authors), edited books, e-books, translated books

Leroux, Marcel. *Global Warming: Myth or Reality?: The Erring Ways of Climatology*. Springer, 2005.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard, Vintage-Random House, 1988.

Greenbaum, Sidney, and Randolph Quirk. *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*. Longman, 1990.

Ellis, Doris et al. *History of Japan*. Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1989.

Hill, Charles A., and Marguerite Helmers, editors. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

Silva, Paul J. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. E-book, American Psychological Association, 2007.

Uzawa, Hirofumi. *Economic Theory and Global Warming*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

Essays from an anthology or a book collection (of essays)

Copeland, Edward. "Money." *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Copeland and Juliet McMaster, Cambridge UP, 1997, pp. 131-48.

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, edited by Ben Rafoth, Heinemann, 2000, pp. 24-34.

* Note that if the work cited is an article from an anthology of essays, you need to cite the individual article and its author, not simply the book and its editor.

Encyclopedia entry online

"Egypt." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2019,
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt>

Movies

An Inconvenient Truth. Directed by Davis Guggenheim, Paramount, 2006.

The Empire Strikes Back. Directed by George Lucas, Twentieth Century Fox, 1980.

*If you want to draw attention to the director or performers, you can begin the citation with them, following by the title for that person:

Lucas, George, director. *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1977.

Music

Beyoncé. "Pray You Catch Me." *Lemonade*, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, www.beyonce.com/album/lemonade-visual-album/.

Page on a website

Lundman, Susan. "How to Make Vegetarian Chili." *eHow*, www.ehow.com/how_10727_make-vegetarian-chili.html. Accessed 6 July 2015.

Examples of poems and short stories

Burns, Robert. "Red, Red Rose." *100 Best-Loved Poems*, edited by Philip Smith, Dover, 1995, p. 26.

Kincaid, Jamaica. "Girl." *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*, edited by Tobias Wolff, Vintage, 1994, pp. 306-07.

Hooker, Jeremy. "Strawberry Field." *Cut of the Light: Poems 1965-2005*, edited by Jeremy Hooker, Enitharmon Press, 2006, p. 251.

*If the specific literary work is part of the author's own collection (all of the works have the same author), there will be no editor to reference:

Whitman, Walt. "I Sing the Body Electric." *Selected Poems*, Dover, 1991, pp. 12-19.

Carter, Angela. "The Tiger's Bride." *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Stories*, Penguin, 1995, pp. 154-69.

TV show

"94 Meetings." *Parks and Recreation*, created by Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, performance by Amy Poehler, season 2, episode 21, Deedle-Dee Productions and Universal Media Studios, 2010.

Youtube video

"Laughing at Myself." *YouTube*, uploaded by FunnyGuy, 10 July 2010, URL.

The MLA 7th edition

Optionally, have a look at the possible citing situations in MLA seventh edition, which is included here because it is still very much in use. These examples are taken from the library of the University of Pittsburg: <pitt.libguides.com/c.php?g=379652&p=2583766>

Material Type	Works Cited
Book in print	Card, Claudia. <i>The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil</i> . Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
eBook	Dzau, Victor J. and Mark A. Creager. "Chapter 231: Diseases of the Aorta." <i>Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine</i> . McGraw-Hill, 1999. Web. 7 Sept. 2006.
An article in a print journal	Doggart, Julia. "Minding the Gap: Realizing Our Ideal Community Writing Assistance Program." <i>The Community Literacy Journal</i> 2.1 (2007): 71-80. Print.
An article in an electronic journal	Sherrard-Johnson, Cherene. "'A Plea for Color': Nella Larsen's Iconography of the Mulatta." <i>American Literature</i> 76.4 (2004): 833-869. EBSCOhost. Web. 10 Sept. 2009.
A encyclopedia entry	Foster, John S., Jr. "Nuclear War." <i>The Encyclopedia Americana</i> . Intl. ed. 1998. Print.
A government publication	United States. Federal Maritime Commission. <i>Hawaiian Trade Study: An Economic Analysis</i> . Washington: GPO, 1978. Print.
An interview you conducted	Brandt, Deborah. Personal interview. 28 May 2008. (Note: List the interview under the name of the interviewee)
A film/DVD	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i> . Screenplay by Emma Thompson and Jane Austen. Dir. Ang Lee. Perf. Emma Thompson, and Kate Winslet. Sony, 1999. DVD. (Note: Dir = Director. Perf. = Performer(s). List both after the title of the film or DVD)
A Page on a Website with no author	"New Media @ the Center." <i>The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison</i> . U of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, 2009. Web. 11 Sept. 2009.
A Page on a Website with an author	Peace, Richard. "Fathers and Children: Understanding Nature." <i>The Novels of Turgenev: Symbols and Emblems</i> . U of Bristol P, 20 July 2002. Web. 5 May 2005.
Website - online government publication	United States. Dept. of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. <i>Trends in Violent Victimization by Age, 1973-2005</i> . 10 Sept. 2006. Web. 3 Oct. 2006.
Email	Woodward, Julian. "Newborn FAQs." Message to Michelle Roberts. 28 Mar. 2008. E-mail.
Discussion list (listserv)	Stein, Cindy. "Chessie Rescue - Annapolis MD." <i>Chessie-L listserv</i> . 16 May 1997. E-mail.
Radio/TV episode - from library database	"Beyond Vick: Animal Cruelty for Sport." <i>Morning Edition</i> . NPR. 8 Aug. 2007. <i>Academic OneFile</i> . Web. 5 May 2008.
Radio/TV episode - from website	"Federal Prosecutors Eye MySpace Bullying Case." <i>All Things Considered</i> . NPR. 14 Jan. 2008. Web. 15 Jan. 2008.
Film - from website	<i>The Landlord</i> . Perf. Will Ferrell and Adam McKay. 2007. <i>Funny or Die</i> . Web. 15 Jan. 2008.

Artwork - from library database	Clark, Larry. <i>Man with Baby</i> . ca. 1960s. George Eastman House, Rochester, NY. <i>ARTstor</i> . Web. 15 Jan. 2008.
Artwork - from website	Close, Chuck. <i>Ronald</i> . 2002. Museum of Modern Art, New York. <i>MoMA</i> . Web. 5 Jan. 2008.
Photograph - from website	<i>Viewing the Unfortunates at the Morgue</i> . N.d. <i>The Triangle Factory File</i> . Cornell Univeristy ILR School, 2005. Web. 16 Oct. 2010.

Please, note that a hanging indent is used in the Works Cited section.

*The 8th MLA edition simplifies the above method and opts for a more user-friendly approach to citing, but there are not very many differences between the 7th and the 8th edition. We have included examples of the 7th edition because many academics still use this format. Some of the most important differences are that in the 8th edition:

- The city of publication (i.e. Oxford) and the medium (print) are not needed.
- When quoting an article from a journal, you introduce the abbreviations vol. and no. to identify volume and number of the journal and separate this information with commas. You also include p. and pp. to indicate that the number refers to the pages. In the 7th edition this abbreviation was not included and you had to use parenthesis and colon to separate the year and the pages and, therefore, the information remained more cryptic.

You can find examples of these changes at

<https://style.mla.org/whats-new/> and

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_8th_edition_changes.html

In any case, the most important thing is that you cite consistently, no matter which citation style you are using. One of the best references for citing is the MLA Style Center (<https://style.mla.org/>) and the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.purdue.edu/>). In these two excellent resources you will also find sample papers in MLA style. You can rely on them for future reference when in doubt or as a reminder. Another reliable source, clear and to the point is: <https://irsc.libguides.com/mla/intextexamples> (IRSC Libraries)

There are also plenty of “citation machines” on the web that automatically cite your sources. Purdue Owl has one (“cite your source automatically in MLA”) and also this popular website: <https://www.bibme.org/citation-guide/mla/>.

8. Is My Paper Good? A Basic Guide to Self-Assessment

The question of how to write a good quality essay may seem vague and daunting. In order not to be at a loss about what kind of skills are at stake when you write an essay and about how they will impact its grading, have a look at the following questions that you can ask yourself before and after the process of writing the paper. Although this basic guide to self-assessment is rather flexible and there may be other self-assessment options, it is likely to give you an approximate estimate of the final grade your essay can achieve.

For one thing, the assessment criteria for a literary analysis paper comes mainly from common sense. Does your paper have a focus? The focus has to be made clear from the very beginning, in the **title** of the paper. The mere title of a literary work does not per se properly make the title of your essay. The literary work is just your corpus, now you need a purpose for your analysis: a perspective, an aim, a working hypothesis. Write a developed introduction.

Your paper should have **progression**. Sometimes papers just include a list of characteristics of the literary text, which are mentioned at the beginning and at the end with no nuance. There is no development. Think of your essay as a story, as if it were a narrative where there is suspense, some action, as if you were moving toward a particular direction, as if you knew that the climax is the result of a process you have set in motion at the beginning. This process is energized by your perceptions, by your thoughts, by a reflective choice of words.

Word choice is very important, if you do not write with precision, what you write will not make sense, meaning will be elusive. Add details to support statements.

Aid yourself with citations that are relevant to your idea. Analyze or comment on them so that they are not just padding. Make them form part of your own train of thought. Cite them correctly. The supporting material has to be well integrated into your perspective.

Above all, **value** analysis and interpretation over summary or paraphrase.

The following is a possible guide, among many, to self-assess your work by bearing in mind some areas of excellence to cover: quality of research and of expression, structure, and ethics. I hope this annotated rubric can help you meet the academic standards in essay writing. Some professors use rubrics for their assessment, they are also called grading sheets or assessment criteria.

Quality of research

1. I have made a distinct point about a single topic and I show evident awareness of a particular task. I express a good understanding of the text/the film and of the secondary sources. I am able to create wholly original ideas. I can creatively integrate discovered information into my own analysis. I have paid appropriate attention to the ideological and formal levels of the texts. I have avoided superficial considerations or trite remarks.

EXCELLENT: 9.5 to 10

VERY GOOD: 8.5 to 9

GOOD: 7 to 8

ADEQUATE: 5 to 6.5

2. My essay does not have a focus or a clear argument. I often repeat the same idea. I often recapitulate arguments of others with only minor changes. My conclusion does not advance any insight. My introduction and my conclusion are basically the same.

POOR: 4 to 4.5

VERY POOR: 0 to 3.5

Quality of expression

1. My viewpoint and ideas are expressed clearly. My response to the text is vivid, relevant, and/or well-documented. My essay gives specific evidence and examples. My essay can be read with ease (sentence and paragraph fluency) and shows no or few errors of expression (grammar, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation).

EXCELLENT: 9.5 to 10

VERY GOOD: 8.5 to 9

GOOD: 7 to 8

ADEQUATE: 5 to 6.5

2. My essay has low readability, i.e., my comments are too simple or confusing, and/or it shows an inconsistent arrangement of content, with no attempts at transition. I have included no examples. Evidence and examples are not relevant and/or are not explained. There is no introduction or conclusion, my paper just begins and ends. My essay has many grammar and vocabulary mistakes.

POOR: 4 to 4.5

VERY POOR: 0 to 3.5

Organization and layout

1. I have managed to arrange content adequately and have included proper subtle transitions. I can properly cite diverse resources. I have used parenthetical citations in the text and included a Works Cited page.

EXCELLENT: 9.5 to 10

VERY GOOD: 8.5 to 9

GOOD: 7 to 8

ADEQUATE: 5 to 6.5

2. My essay shows no sense of structure or a purpose. My essay includes mostly scattered or unconnected ideas. There is no elaboration of the ideas on my part. My essay shows no sense of development. I do not acknowledge my sources or do not cite them properly.

POOR /VERY POOR

POOR: 4 to 4.5

VERY POOR: 0 to 3.5

Ethics

1. I have properly acknowledged all my sources and therefore I have entirely avoided plagiarism. I have devoted enough time to reading the texts, and if necessary, relevant criticism on the topic, which allows me to show a nuanced appreciation of the issues under discussion.

EXCELLENT: 9.5 to 10

VERY GOOD: 8.5 to 9

GOOD: 7 to 8

ADEQUATE: 5 to 6.5

2. I do not acknowledge my sources or cite them incorrectly. I have not devoted enough time or effort to think through the issues I mention in the essay.

POOR: 4 to 4.5

VERY POOR: 0 to 3.5

9. Testimonials

Where do you think lies the power of literature?

Carla Ovejas:

To me, literature is a sort of refuge, something I rely on when I feel trapped or frustrated. It brings new worlds to my life, it makes me experience things that, if it were not for the power of literature, I could never have imagined. Literature transports you into the lives of others, it turns you into a child, an old woman, a man... I feel powerful. I think all of us feel powerful when we read literature, because it helps us transcend our own limits.

Oana Plamada:

Literature has actually governed my entire life. Since early childhood I have been an avid reader, grabbing any book whose cover called my attention and now, in my late thirties, I cannot stop looking for more stories to dip into. Nevertheless, I have to point that covers are not an essential factor when I choose what to read. I cannot imagine my life, either personal or professional, without the pleasure of reading good and not so good stories. I become more knowledgeable, more understanding and more open to new horizons (a kind of pretentious word). I read in three languages (Romanian, English and Spanish) and I discover nuances, similarities and beliefs that make me question the word "boundaries". I have learned to listen more (compassionate listening) and not to jump to risky conclusions. I become more tolerant with what life has on its tray for me and I have learned that it is healthy to avoid negative energy. Books have given me peace and quiet when I was worried but there is more than that, they have given me reasons to keep on moving when nothing seemed right.

Concha Peñaranda:

I believe literature is a relevant key to open our mind to different ways of thinking by introducing us to different worlds. To me, it is a door to different universes and as such, it is freedom to travel to creative scenarios depending on what it may inspire me more at certain moments.

Literature has been part of my life since I was a child, so that depends on every specific situation. Sometimes I needed to be out of the problem that I had to deal with and I

searched for humoristic books, other times I needed stories in which I could feel as if they were a place in which I could find shelter, and other times books in which I could learn from different stories. In fact, I continue to make use of books in these ways.

Be open minded and allow yourself to enjoy as much as possible from every possible reading. It will lead you to discover an incredible universe full of incredible experiences. All of them will teach you something interesting!

Jesús López:

Reading is for suckers, it is what you do in your summer vacation in order to deliver a set of activities to your teacher in September. It is the daily bread of the loser, the one that has no friends to hang out with, the nerd. It is for that person that does not know how to live in the real world.

I used to think this way. There is a severe stigma related to what literature stands for and what does it mean to enjoy reading. Part of that problem arises in the very classroom. When no time is devoted to making literature interesting, students will naturally and inevitably avoid any contact with it. It is not easy to educate students in matters of literature, for the vast majority of our academic lives are spent learning facts, know-how knowledge, events, what is the cause of a particular consequence. We store information. Literature, however, cannot be totally captured in the learning process; its essence resides in the experience of the act of reading, of living it. Regardless of the stage of your academic journey, literature courses do not feature as much reading activities as they should. One may have their own hypothesis, but I tend to think that teachers and professors pretend to cover and summarize too much content within a short period of time. Consequently, no particular area is emphasized, making the materials equally uninteresting due to a lack of spotlight.

In this sense, I have always felt there was a need for spending time reading and discussing the works assigned by the professor. It was not until the last year of my degree that I came across with "*Literatura Norteamericana*" and "*Otras Literaturas en Inglés*", courses that allowed the development of the student both as a reader and as a critic. It is fundamental for the growth of the individual as a person to understand and learn the value of reading and processing a text, creating an opinion and expound it to somebody else, whether it is in a presentation, an impromptu debate or an academic essay. In particular, the selection of works for both of these courses was thoroughly pleasing. The stories one encountered in these stories aided the student to identify the social and historical situation they address, thus rendering those typical preceding introductions to the context quite unnecessary. The same goes with the style, the tone, the theme and all those elements that are presented to the student before actually opening a book. By means of reading and thinking, one is able to attain a level of knowledge that was only said to be encountered in textbooks. In other words, a literature course of this nature enables the student to adopt an active role in their education, an unusual yet incredibly useful method.

Religion, race, nationality, sex, gender, trauma, and poverty constitute a brief list of issues that were addressed in these courses, and because of the new condition of the student as a free-thinker, one reflects upon them without prejudices, becoming wiser in the process. As for how it is possible that such a course could benefit a student when it comes to the ruthlessness of the academic sphere, I am of the opinion that the broader perspective you have in any particular area, the easier you will operate within the many different aspects within that area. If it was not for an open-minded methodology, students would always be restricted to the traditional objects of study, the same patterns of analysis, the same criteria, the same way of looking at literary works.

Inspired. By what? By whom?

Concha Peñaranda:

Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Twain's courage inspired me. He tackled delicate matters in the 19th century, his masterful way of condemning American society by means of satire. He deals with social matters by means of a calculated "chaotic" structure, which adds a vivid realism; his wit to create confusions of man's moral sense; his skill to create a genuine ironic vision by means of black humour and sarcasm that condemn institutions, social organizations, high class people and racial identities. He taught me the hypocrisy of social order, the weakness of a fragile society with no solid foundations and above all, the courage of writers such as Mark Twain who dared to cross frontiers.

It reminded me of the power of literature in history, which allows us to realize how similar our problems are to those described by Mark Twain in the 19th century. How easy it is to be manipulated; how powerful discrimination is nowadays despite our progress. As consequence, how important it is to be aware of history in order to improve ourselves and prevent human injustice, being literature an ideal ally. Mark Twain induces us, as readers, to be aware of our own responsibility as human beings.

Sheila Pita:

Virginia Woolf is an author that I admire for many reasons: she has the capacity of making me feel her words as my own. She was very eloquent and her mind was a hundred steps forward from people of her time. I admire her honesty and bravery for speaking up about things that women were not supposed to and for opening herself up to the world and dealing with sensitive issues that still nowadays are difficult to approach. Her writing is complex and full of meaning but still, her words transport you to other places and make you feel every detail.

Leire Martín:

Thanks to the course of *Other Literatures* I discovered Margaret Atwood, who has been a referent in feminism in Canada and North America in the 80s. Therefore, I would

recommend Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian novel in which women are treated as objects and they are classified depending on their "capacity" to procreate. Thanks to this novel I found Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, again a dystopian world but in this case women rule the world, and it is really shocking to see how, for example, men are scared of walking alone at night. And last, but not least, I would recommend Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, an eye-opening novel that relates how difficult it is to be a woman in Africa and aspiring to study and have a future.

Carla Ovejas:

I could not choose only one literary work because I think that each literary work is special and has its own appeal. However, if I were to choose one, I would say that a book that changed my perspective on things when I was going through a rough time is *Cinco panes de cebada* by Lucía Baquedano. When I read it, I was feeling sad and disappointed and it helped me to understand that we can surmount problems and make the most out of them. When I reread it, I did not see it with the same eyes as the first time, but I think that is also one of the powers of literature, that it can save you. Maybe this is not one of the best novels ever, but it is the one that helped me in that tough moment.

Analía Herrera:

I must admit that I have not read many works by Sylvia Plath but I feel inspired when I read something from her. Currently I am reading *The Bell Jar* because when we read some of her poems in class I had the need to look for more information. I noticed that I read more female authors than before, especially when it is about poetry, because I feel more connected to them, as if they understood me better because of the fact of being women. But in the case of Sylvia Plath, I can understand her, and the powerful emotions she felt because of the way she described them. Even though I did not feel them myself, I can identify with her struggles, her happiness or emptiness. There is a particular sentence that resonated in me: "The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence." Every time that I read it, I find a new meaning of it, maybe because depending on my mood that day I interpret it in a different way. Sometimes I connect it to the emptiness that we sometimes feel, other times I think that she is talking about the silence that we impose ourselves regarding our problems, and the fact that we must overcome them and trust other people. I think that I feel inspired by her work because she seems honest about everything in them, she does not try to hide her fears, and that makes me feel stronger about my own feelings.

Oana Plamada:

My favourite writers are Fyodor Dostoevsky, Isabel Allende, Dionne Brand, John Steinbeck, Mircea Eliade. Also Marin Preda, a Romanian novelist whose name is totally

unknown abroad but whose witty style captivated me and earned me a national prize on Romanian Literature Olympics. I have to say that it is always difficult to answer this question.

What would you be if you were a book? (self-asked question) I would be a fairy tale, but if I think deeper I could be *The Lord of the Rings* or *Pride*, or *Prejudice* or *Life on the Mississippi*, or... Oh what a question! I could not give an exact answer.

Sara Paniagua:

If I had to choose one author that has inspired me the most in the past few years, I would have to say Sui Ishida. He is a Japanese manga author who is known for *Tokyo Ghoul* and *Tokyo Ghoul: re*. In a way, reading his work was a turning point in my own writing since he creates a dark aesthetic in connection to identity issues and also in other topics such as prejudice and oppression toward minorities. I would say that his poetry was somewhat similar to the idea I had of how I really wanted to write, using an aesthetically pleasing dark atmosphere and a heavily symbolic language.

While publishing weekly chapters of his work, he added extra content by drawing the characters of the manga and writing poetry about them that would connect directly to the story, giving the readers hints about the heavy symbolism that is deeply rooted in the series. From my point of view, it was a phenomenal way to keep the readers in touch with the manga and to make them grow into the characters so that we could analyse and understand the whole picture better.

Jesús López:

It is difficult to choose just one fragment of a text, or just a work, or even just an author. Each author conveys something special in each of their works. The raw imagery in Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl", the intellectual exercise that Margaret Atwood's "Bread" or the innovative style of Jamaica Kincaid are equally stimulating yet different experiences. To pay homage to all of them, I wanted to hereby mention a literary work I became interested in because of reading those.

In the summer of 2018, I read *Tales of the Tikongs*, a short-story collection written by Epli Hau'ofa. In this work, Hau'ofa portrays how the fictional island of Tiko is suffering the effects of globalization while being just a small portion of land in the South Pacific Ocean. His satirical and humorous narrator relates the day-to-day ventures of the islanders, who are starting to adopt the trends and customs of the "civilised world", forgetting their own cultural identity in the process. Although it may not seem like a flashy plot, it is a thoroughly enlightening vision of the world that we do not get to see very often. What the work of Hau'ofa offers to the reader is the testimony of the Pacific islander, a voice that Western society would probably never hear.

The reason why I talk about this work in particular is because I was not asked to read it, I chose it. After dealing with and writing an essay on Kincaid's *A Small Place*, I wondered if there would be another work of a similar nature that addresses analogous situations in places which the public eye never sees. And that is precisely one of the most important gifts that literature has ever granted me, the desire to seek and know more than I do now.

Janire Martínez:

Not Wanted on the Voyage, written by Canadian author Timothy Findley. It was recommended to me by the courses' teacher and so I read it over the summer... it touched me deeply and moved me more than any other book ever has. Let me try and summarize its plot in a few words. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is a retelling of the biblical story of Noah and the ark, which is presented to us from a very different perspective to the one we are used to hearing, that of his wife, Mrs Noyes. Our protagonist is an old woman who has spent her whole life working tirelessly to please her husband and sons. She has long given up on her own dreams, stopped singing, her voice becoming quieter and quieter. At the start of the novel we are presented with a submissive wife and mother who lives for those rare moments of peace when she can sit on the porch overlooking the yard and the forest far ahead with Motty!, her old blind cat, drowning her sorrows in gin... but she soon transforms into one of the most empowering female characters in literature. After God decides to send forth a flood to punish humanity and as the rains begin, Mrs Noyes rebels against the tyranny of Noah, standing up for the powerless like her. If you desire to know whether she manages to turn hierarchies upside down, you will have to read it for yourself. But I can mention here that our heroine suspects that, once the rain subsides, her husband will restore the old order of things. She is overwhelmed by fear and feels pity for those who, like her, will be oppressed and exploited when the waters recede and so she prays... not to the divinity that has allowed so much suffering, but for the rain to continue to fall, postponing the inevitable end. So, to put it briefly, my personal recommendation is that you give this novel a shot or, at least, that you try reading a retelling of a canonical story and see how it changes your understanding of it (Ursula K. LeGuin's short story "She Unnames Them" could be a nice introduction to the genre). The revision of texts that are at the very foundation of our civilization is much necessary, as it problematizes discourses that have been accepted as natural law and gives voice to the voiceless. Books like this inspire me and make me want to change things. By challenging my perception, they help me become a more open-minded person.

In which ways your origins made you connect with the literatures written in English you studied on your fourth year at university?

Analía Herrera:

When we dealt with colonialism I felt really intrigued by my origins and ancestry. I always had questions about my ancestry because I am from Chile and I had heard about

colonization before, but I did not think about it twice. However, after talking about the colonization of the Americas, especially of South America, I started to make questions about it to my family. Yet, I still have not had an answer for my questions because my family do not know where we are from either.

From my point of view, it is obvious that there is a misinformation about this topic in South America since few people think about this, or are interested in discovering their origins. It is obvious that there are exceptions, but generally people study that period in history and that is all.

There is another aspect that changed my mind after attending these classes. The portrayal of colonization by white people was always a good one; they went to the Americas to be the saviours, of the people, the land, etc. While I was studying these matters, I realized that I had never reconsidered what it meant to be colonized. It was a distant period of time in my mind so I did not have the need to think about it. Now, this glorification disgusts me and because of that I felt more attracted to the types of stories that show the other point of view, of the people that suffered it and are still suffering it.

About poetry

Any nasty side effects of reading poetry? Not to worry! For those who say they are allergic to poetry, please be sure that poetry does not contain any allergen. Here you can read a student's personal manifesto on the effects of reading poetry.

Jesús López Antoñanzas:

For the most part, our academic system does not value literature, let alone poetry, due to the many prejudices that emanate from the eternal rivalry between mathematical-analytical science and human-related approaches to knowledge and life. Alpha versus omega. The never-ending crap that you have been hearing since you were a youngster.

If you are reading this, you might be part of this strange secret society of those who see in art, especially in literature, a window through which one sees the world without circumscribing it in the here and now. If so, you will likely agree with me when I say that what you have been taught at school is mostly prose, novels to be precise, written by historically renown authors. Poetry-wise, you are fluent in counting syllables with your fingers, whilst you are fully proficient in vaguely stating that a poem *is* about love, nature, peace or any other one-word idea of the same nature. Personally, I highly doubt that during my tenure during secondary school I had ever read a poem with the care and dedication that it requires.

Poetry is not just troubadours and epic poems, and it is certainly not limited to the likes of Wordsworth and Poe. Do not let your curiosity be restricted to those ideas that have

been established as the norm. There is an entire universe of poetic creations out there, but it is you that has to find them. After getting to know an immense amount of diverse literary genres, styles and works, I can assure you that there is not a person who does not like reading, but people who are yet to find their cup of tea. There is something for everybody and anybody can rejoice in reading poetry. You may already love poetry. If that is the case, read even more. There is a plethora of writers whose names and poems are not as well-known as those you had had contact with during your literature courses. Get out of the main road and give a chance to other poetic expressions.

Although you might have been told that a poem is not good enough or that an author is not gifted for this craft, it is your vision, your voice, what truly matters. The idiosyncrasy of the genre provides room for your interpretation, and, generally speaking, what you think a poem is about may be as important as what a coursebook rules. Moreover, it is not only what you think but also what you feel. Poetry heals, ameliorates and elevates our soul, but it also hurts the heart, amplifies the anguish and provides a mirror to our tragedy. Poetry helps the human spirit soar.

About words: A hand-written testimonial by Elizabeth Navarro Echeverría

The power of words

"She was fascinated by words. To her, words were things of beauty, each like a magical powder or potion that could be combined with other words to create powerful spells".

Dean Koontz, *Lightning*.

Language is, without question, the most sublime invention of the human kind. Without it our present degree of development would not be possible. It is with words that the human shapes reality. Religions have acknowledged the power of words since ancient times, and they have imbued them with all sorts of magical connotations. As an instance we have the biblical creation of the world: when God commands "there shall be light", light is created. The Creation takes place once the words are uttered. Such an example shows the extent to which language is essential for the human race. It is the most striking feature of man. It is what distinguishes us from ~~humans~~ animals. It is magical. But it can be extremely dangerous as well.

The principle of language is communication. Through words individuals have access to another's thoughts or,

in other words, another person's mind. In addition it is the system used to transfer the knowledge of the world from one to another: that is what we name learning.

From the cradle up we are given a particular vision of the world through the powerful words. They first shape (the) physical objects, then they shape ideas. Finally ideas shape our minds, and these words create our own peculiar sense of reality. Nonetheless this is not the most splendid feature of language. The sorcery of speech relies in the power of creating bridges between minds. Thus its danger. Once one has access to another's psyche manipulation is easily achieved. How is it possible? Through the use of language's tender and seductive sprout: storytelling.

"Stories are the wildest things of all, the monster rumbled. Stories chase and bite and hunt".

Patrick Ness, "A Monster Calls"

Identity as a construction through storytelling.

Once human beings reach a certain age they become authors of their own narrative. The self is thereafter perceived as an actor in relation to explicit traits and roles it plays: writer, researcher, musician, mother, teacher, student, spiritual, independent... Consequently, the personal narration always takes place in relation to others. Features such as gender, class or nationality interweave with personal experience, traits and roles in order to create a fiction of self.

In a like manner external narrations intertwine with personal ones weaving a complex web of stories which unquestionably determine who we are. Such an ability for storytelling is decisive for self-determination. As might be expected it can be equally menacing. Words may be twisted into any shape. These narratives might be used in order to justify hideous acts or to simply clothe them with a gorgeous ideal able to conceal the real extent of the horror. They are tools which fight remorse and create alleviation of psychological dissonance. The humankind is after all particularly gifted at self-deception.

Taking everything into account it shall be evident that national and ethnical identity are created in the same fashion. People belonging to these self-proclaimed groups identify themselves with stories and glories of the past, they adapt certain

group traits and they learn to define themselves in opposition to other groups. In order to fulfill the basic need of high self-esteem the group becomes better than any other, though if a group suffers oppression of any kind by another the negative feedback received creates a crisis of identity and a sense of complete loss of self worth.

On the whole it is not wonder that certain national symbols and fables do have great influence in the way its people behave. They might as well conceal a dark truth about human brutality and savagery within the nation's history through the use of refined values. This is the case of America.

The previous handwritten words are two excerpts from a portfolio in which Elizabeth Navarro Echeverría wrote a creative reflection on the course on North American Literatures. She speaks about the magic of words but also about the harmful effect of narratives when used by the state or by the media to distort history and to ignore the rights and dignity of people. In many situations, people are divided into classifications that revolve around physical appearance, dress code, income, accent, race, ethnicity, origins, gender, class... These categories are often demeaning. Language does not only open up new possibilities for imagining and doing things, it can also be used to restrict our thinking options, and either way we need to be attentive and careful. That is what literature is for, to liberate us from stereotypes. It is a wonderful tool to discover the world and living it more intensely, to improve critical thinking and to achieve a more empathetic mindset. Jessamyn West said in her 1957 book *To See the Dream* that “fiction reveals truths that reality obscures”.



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