
WOMEN AND MEN



*Sidney Goodman (1936–), “Ann and Andrew Dintenfass” (1971). Charcoal, 27 × 32½ in.
Courtesy of Terry Dintenfass, Inc., New York.*

From “The Song of Solomon” to the stories of Ernest Hemingway and the poems of Adrienne Rich, the politics of sexuality has been a major subject of literature. Different cultures and historical eras have written into their drama, fiction, poetry, and nonfiction their sexual/social codes: what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a man, what behavior is appropriate and permissible for each gender, how men and women are expected to meet and marry or not, and how women and men form bonds with members of their own sex. Gender and sexuality are political, in the larger sense of that term, because they justify and exemplify the distribution and management of power.

Karl Shapiro’s “Buick,” a love poem to a car, makes us think of other instances in which men have assigned female gender to objects they control and direct. Olgo Broomas’s poem, “Cinderella,” considers the plight of the token woman. Jo Carson, in “I Cannot Remember All the Times” (Varieties of Protest), and Barbara Kingsolver, in “This House I Cannot Leave,” write about violence against women. And Christina Garcia’s story “Ines in the Kitchen” focuses on the shaping of a young wife by her husband to be exactly the type of woman he requires. We see a further example of sexual politics as power relations in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1892 short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” in which a woman is confined to her room (of weird yellow wallpaper) by her physician husband for a “rest cure.” The first person narrator writes: “There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word.”

The different ways women and men perceive the world and the conflict, trouble, tragedy, and sometimes comedy that result have been the subject of much literature. From Shakespearean drama to television sitcoms, misunderstandings that arise when males and females look at the same event and interpret it in widely divergent ways have been a source of laughter and of anger, of tragedy, and of comedy. The way men and women see and judge each other’s behavior is central to many of the works included in this section. Muriel Rukeyser’s poem “Waiting for Icarus” retells with sardonic humor the Greek myth of the man who stole his father’s wings and flew too high. Rukeyser provides us the perspective of the woman who waits for Icarus, increasingly annoyed as the day wears on. Susan Glaspell’s play *Trifles* is a murder mystery that turns on the amazingly different data women and men gather when they look at the same crime scene. Tragic misperception (helped along by treachery) is certainly central to Shakespeare’s great tragedy about jealousy and love, *Othello*. Why are we so ready to believe the worst about those we love the best? The malicious Iago easily manipulates Othello into a belief that his beloved Desdemona has betrayed him. In *Othello*, not only gender differences but also cultural differences lead to tragic mistakes of perception; Othello is a Moor trying and often failing to understand the Venetian society he has moved into. Woman as the embodiment of mysterious and inexplicable yearnings of the puzzled male consciousness is central to Jean Toomer’s “Fern,” an attempt by a northern black man to come to terms with the pain and beauty of the South.

The roles women and men are trained to assume can be comfortable or entrapping. Irish playwright J. M. Synge’s one-act play *Riders to the Sea* explores

the traditional kinds of work, the differing dangers and expectations, in the lives of men and women in the bleak Aran Islands off the coast of Ireland in 1904, while a number of the selections included in this section, written in the second half of the twentieth century, explore the meaning of gender identity. Tupac Shakur's rap song "Keep Ya Head Up" and John Updike's "A & P" both deal with what it means "to be a man" and with the associated social concepts of "honor," "responsibility" and maybe "bravery." But what is a woman's place? How are women defined? Judy Grahn's story "Boys at the Rodeo" looks at one example of twentieth-century ritualized machismo, an afternoon at the rodeo, from a feminist perspective. The narrator's point of view, both inside and outside the system she observes, is crucial to the story's meaning and power. Judy Brady's satiric essay "I Want a Wife" defines the nurturing, supporting, and mirroring functions of the role of a wife in terms that are simultaneously comic and furious, whereas Kate Chopin's ironic "The Story of an Hour," published in 1894, considers the life of a wife versus that of a woman alone. Escaped slave Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I a Woman" reminds readers that gender roles have a racial (and, by implication, class) component. Her speech challenges the definition of "woman" as a white and middle-class lady: "I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?" Richard Rodriguez's personal essay "Huck Finn, Dan Quayle, and the Value of Acceptance" ponders what is involved in "coming out" to one's immigrant parents.

Some of the selections included here focus on women characters testing the limits of their socially defined roles. Virginia Woolf's sketch of Shakespeare's hypothetical sister, Judith, shows what might have happened in the Elizabethan Age to a young woman rebelling against social convention. Marge Piercy's "The woman in the ordinary" describes a woman on the verge of breaking out of her socially defined limitations: "in you bottled up is a woman peppery as curry." Irena Klepfisz's "they did not build wings for them (Growing Up and Growing Older) transforms social stereotypes of old women, in her poem they disappear, move north to the ocean to become artists or move inland to the woods, "where the world was a passionate place." It is useful to compare these two poems from the second wave of feminism (roughly 1967 to the present) with an example from an earlier era of feminist writing (roughly 1875 to 1919), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," which chronicles an ambiguous breakthrough that is also a breakdown and that raises important questions about social conventions and the social definition of madness. Poems by Alma Luz Villanueva, "Crazy Courage," and Stefanie Malis, "Transsexual Cloud," focus on transgender identity.

Beyond the sexual politics of gender (which we consider from other perspectives in *Growing Up and Growing Older* and *Varieties of Protest*), the most common crisis we encounter in the realm of sexual politics begins when we fall in love. The meaning and the experience of love have traditionally been subjects of lyric poetry: from Shakespeare's sonnets to Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems*; from Ted Hughes's view of a failed and destructive marriage

in “The Lovepet” to ntozake shange’s choreopoem about a relationship she managed to get out of just in time, “somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff,” from Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink” to D. H. Lawrence’s gorgeous morning after portrait of a lover, “Gloire de Dijon”; from John Donne’s comic poem “The Flea” to Langston Hughes’s brief and chilling “Mellow,” from Alice Bloch’s progress report on a lesbian relationship, “Six Years,” to Elizabeth Bishop’s villanelle about loss, “One Art.” These poems present a variety of relations between lovers—ritualized equality or inequality, conflict and hostility, romance and reverence, presence and absence—and they include realistic as well as idealistic explorations of human relations in the realm of love. In each case, the images that the poet uses to express or describe love are a clue to the sexual politics of the poem. Not all writing about love, of course, is in the form of poetry. Written from the point of view of the teenage protagonist, Hisaye Yamamoto’s “Seventeen Syllables” explores how one comes to an understanding about one’s own parents’ marriage. Ernest Hemingway’s very short story “Hills Like White Elephants” and Raymond Carver’s “Signals” each present a relationship in trouble and crisis—one is set in a railroad waiting station in post World War I Spain, the other in an upscale restaurant in post World War II U.S.A. The style of both Hemingway’s and Carver’s short stories is typically understated and spare with a minimum of description and authorial musing and a lot of dialogue. How might these stylistic choices in themselves say something about the love relationships in trouble that are at the center of the two stories?

The poems, plays, songs, short stories, and nonfiction included in this section offer a wide range of attitudes, expressed in content and through form, about gender, sexuality, friendship, and love; about the limitations and the possibilities for human growth. In a successful literary work, what we think of as form is not separable from meaning. Formal elements—including character, imagery, setting, plot structure, and point of view—are where the assumptions, “meaning,” and resonance of a work reside. That the play *Trifles* is set entirely in the disordered kitchen of Minnie Wright’s farmhouse is crucial to the women characters’ “reading” of the mystery of John Wright’s murder. That we stay entirely inside the point of view of Tahira Naqui’s protagonist, a Pakistani physician and husband, as he tries to figure out who is sending love letters to his office adds an anxious, slightly claustrophobic, slightly surreal quality to this crisis of middle age and his taken-for-granted marriage. The image of deer hunting at night is as crucial to our understanding of Louise Erdrich’s poem “Jacklight” as a ravenous imaginary animal as the personification of marriage is in Ted Hughes’s “The Love Pet.” Sexual politics is an arena in which we struggle with other issues—of identity, spirituality, power, autonomy, need, and the limiting or the realization of our freedom and potential.

FICTION

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN (1860–1935)

*Soon after Charlotte Perkins Gilman's birth in Hartford, Connecticut, her father abandoned his wife and two children, leaving them in poverty. In need, Gilman's mother sought the help of relatives, in particular, Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sisters, all prominent writers and feminists during the era. In such an environment, Gilman developed a strong and independent sense of her self-worth as a woman. Early on in her career she worked as a teacher and a commercial artist. After becoming deeply depressed after the birth of her first child, a famous neurologist ordered complete bed rest, which made matters worse. Eventually, Gilman left her husband, moved to California, and began writing and speaking on economics and feminism. She edited *The Forerunner*, a feminist journal, from 1909 until 1916. Among Gilman's writings are *Women and Economics* (1898); *Herland* (1915), a utopian novel; and *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1935), her autobiography. The short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," considered one of Gilman's finest works, was written out of her encounter with the late-nineteenth-century medical profession's misdiagnosis of women's physiology and psychology.*

The Yellow Wallpaper

(1892)

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate! Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted? John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is—and tonics, and air and exercise, and journeys, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

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.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition, if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened onto the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said he came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. “Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear,” said he, “and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time.” So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first, and then playroom and

gymnasium, I should judge, for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling, flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough constantly to irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting: a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight. It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterward he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

"You know the place is doing you good," he said, "and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental."

“Then do let us go downstairs,” I said. “There are such pretty rooms there.”

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as anyone need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden—those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely shaded winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone, and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had Mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell¹ in the fall.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worthwhile to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps *because* of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

¹American neurologist (1829–1914) who treated Gilman.

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way, each breadth stands alone; the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of “debased Romanesque” with delirium tremens—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing sea-weeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all—the interminable grotesque seems to form around a common center and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess.

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much. John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort—the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all; I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise—but I keep watch for it all the same.

There are things in that wallpaper that nobody knows about but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why, darling!" said he. "Our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.

"The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course, if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here but it is worse in the morning when you are away!"

"Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug. "She shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!"

"And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily.

"Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we'll take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better!"

"Better in body perhaps—" I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?"

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—oh, no!

The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper, she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself.

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see, I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was *because* of the wallpaper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

I'm feeling so much better!

I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal during the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first—and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer now that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her, she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn! I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a wind.

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are affected by it. Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing; but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook. I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it today!

We go away tomorrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but Me—not *alive!*

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could, and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs tonight, and take the boat home tomorrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will *not* move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying to Jennie for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John, dear!" said I in the gentlest voice. "The key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said, very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!" And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

“What is the matter?” he cried. “For God’s sake, what are you doing!”

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

“I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

Study and Discussion Questions

1. What do the narrator and the woman in the wallpaper have in common?
2. Is the narrator right to be suspicious of her husband or is her suspicion simply a manifestation of her nervous ailment?
3. Why is the narrator so tired?
4. What kind of person does John want his wife to be? How does he try to maneuver her into being that?
5. What is the significance of the fact that the narrator’s room was originally a nursery?
6. “There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word.” Why doesn’t John want her to write? Why does she disagree with him?
7. How does the way the narrator sees and feels about the yellow wallpaper change during the story?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Who is John? List the words that describe him. Write a brief character sketch.
2. Gilman wrote this story in 1890 as a warning about a treatment for nervous depression fashionable then. Gilman herself was told to “live as domestic a life as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day” and “never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again.” Discuss the way in which the treatment which is supposed to cure the narrator worsens her condition, and speculate about the reasons.
3. What is wrong with this marriage?

Critical Resources

1. Dock, Julie, ed. *“The Yellow Wallpaper” and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Casebook*. University Park: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998.
2. Golden, Catherine, ed. *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on The Yellow Wallpaper*. New York: Feminist Press at City University, 1992.
3. Karpinsky, Joanne, ed. *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Toronto: G.K. Hall, 1992.



ERNEST HEMINGWAY (1899–1961)

*Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois. As a boy he went on frequent hunting and fishing trips in northern Michigan with his father, a doctor. He boxed and played football in high school and, after graduating, worked as a newspaper reporter. Near the end of World War I, Hemingway was a volunteer ambulance driver and then a soldier in Italy, where he was wounded. He spent much of the 1920s in Paris and the 1930s in Key West, Florida. He was an active supporter of the Republican Revolutionary Cause in the Spanish Civil War and worked as a war correspondent during World War II. His writings include the novels *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and *The Old Man and The Sea* (1952); the collections *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938); and the memoir *A Moveable Feast* (1964, posthumously). In 1954, he received the Nobel Prize for literature. "Hills Like White Elephants," taken from the short story collection *Men Without Women* (1927), demonstrates Hemingway's concise use of dialogue.*

Hills Like White Elephants

(1927)

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

"What should we drink?" the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the man said.

"Let's drink beer."

"*Dos cervezas*," the man said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones."

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

The girl looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro. It's a drink."

"Could we try it?"

The man called "Listen" through the curtain. The woman came out from the bar.

"Four reales."

"We want two Anis del Toro."

"With water?"

"Do you want it with water?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "Is it good with water?"

"It's all right."

"You want them with water?" asked the woman.

"Yes, with water."

"It tastes like licorice," the girl said and put the glass down.

"That's the way with everything."

"Yes," said the girl. "Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe."

"Oh, cut it out."

"You started it," the girl said. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time."

"Well, let's try and have a fine time."

"All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn't that bright?"

"That was bright."

"I wanted to try this new drink: That's all we do, isn't it—look at things and try new drinks?"

"I guess so."

The girl looked across at the hills.

"They're lovely hills," she said. "They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees."

"Should we have another drink?"

"All right."

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

"The beer's nice and cool," the man said.

"It's lovely," the girl said.

"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

"I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in."

The girl did not say anything.

"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Then what will we do afterward?"

"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

“That’s the only thing that bothers us. It’s the only thing that’s made us unhappy.”

The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

“And you think then we’ll be all right and be happy.”

“I know we will. You don’t have to be afraid. I’ve known lots of people that have done it.”

“So have I,” said the girl. “And afterward they were all so happy.”

“Well,” the man said, “if you don’t want to you don’t have to. I wouldn’t have you do it if you don’t want to. But I know it’s perfectly simple.”

“And you really want to?”

“I think it’s the best thing to do. But I don’t want you to do it if you don’t really want to.”

“And if I do it you’ll be happy and things will be like they were and you’ll love me?”

“I love you now. You know I love you.”

“I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you’ll like it?”

“I’ll love it. I love it now but I just can’t think about it. You know how I get when I worry.”

“If I do it you won’t ever worry?”

“I won’t worry about that because it’s perfectly simple.”

“Then I’ll do it. Because I don’t care about me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t care about me.”

“Well, I care about you.”

“Oh, yes. But I don’t care about me. And I’ll do it and then everything will be fine.”

“I don’t want you to do it if you feel that way.”

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

“And we could have all this,” she said. “And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible.”

“What did you say?”

“I said we could have everything.”

“We can have everything.”

“No, we can’t.”

“We can have the whole world.”

“No, we can’t.”

“We can go everywhere.”

“No, we can’t. It isn’t ours any more.”

“It’s ours.”

“No, it isn’t. And once they take it away, you never get it back.”

“But they haven’t taken it away.”

“We’ll wait and see.”

“Come on back in the shade,” he said. “You mustn’t feel that way.”

“I don’t feel any way,” the girl said. “I just know things.”

“I don’t want you to do anything that you don’t want to do—”

“Nor that isn’t good for me,” she said. “I know. Could we have another beer?”

“All right. But you’ve got to realize—”

“I realize,” the girl said. “Can’t we maybe stop talking?”

They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the man looked at her and at the table.

“You’ve got to realize,” he said, “that I don’t want you to do it if you don’t want to. I’m perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you.”

“Doesn’t it mean anything to you? We could get along.”

“Of course it does. But I don’t want anybody but you. I don’t want any one else. And I know it’s perfectly simple.”

“Yes, you know it’s perfectly simple.”

“It’s all right for you to say that, but I do know it.”

“Would you do something for me now?”

“I’d do anything for you.”

“Would you please please please please please please stop talking?”

He did not say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.

“But I don’t want you to,” he said, “I don’t care anything about it.”

“I’ll scream,” the girl said.

The woman came out through the curtains with two glasses of beer and put them down on the damp felt pads. “The train comes in five minutes,” she said.

“What did she say?” asked the girl.

“That the train is coming in five minutes.”

The girl smiled brightly at the woman, to thank her.

“I’d better take the bags over to the other side of the station,” the man said. She smiled at him.

“All right. Then come back and we’ll finish the beer.”

He picked up the two heavy bags and carried them around the station to the other tracks. He looked up the tracks but could not see the train. Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people. They were all waiting reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him.

“Do you feel better?” he asked.

“I feel fine,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.”

Study and Discussion Questions

1. What is this couple arguing about? What clues let you know? Why do you think Hemingway doesn’t allow his characters to say directly what they are talking about?

2. What is the balance of power between the man and the woman in this story? How does Hemingway construct this balance of power? What factors are involved in the situation? What factors are involved in Hemingway's stylistic choices, including how the two characters are referred to?
3. What effects do the descriptions of the setting have in the midst of this couple's argument?
4. Why this particular title—"Hills Like White Elephants"? What does that mean to you? How does it fit the story?
5. The "girl" says: "That's all we do, isn't it—look at things and try new drinks?" Describe the life they seem to be leading. When do you think this story is set?
6. What is the man's argument? What does he want? Is he conflicted? How is he trying to get his way?
7. What is the woman's argument, or defense? What does she want—Is it possible that she wants more than one thing?
8. How does the lack of attribution in the dialogue affect the story and the way you perceive the characters?

Suggestions for Writing:

1. Write about communication and miscommunication between men and women, or between couples, from your own experience. How is communication and miscommunication happening in "Hills Like White Elephants"?
2. Jump to six months later and write a scene between the two characters in this story.

Critical Resources

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2. Broer, Lawrence and Gloria Holland, eds. *Hemingway and Women: Female Critics and Female Voices*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2002.
3. Bruccoli, Matthew. *Conversations with Ernest Hemingway*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1986.
4. Lynn, Kenneth. *Hemingway*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
5. Tyler, Lisa. *Student Companion to Ernest Hemingway*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001.



RAYMOND CARVER (1938–1988)

Raymond Carver was born in Clatskanie, Oregon, but spent the bulk of his childhood and adolescence in Yakima, Washington. Carver would be the first one in his family to graduate from high school. He married in 1957 and immediately started a family. During the following decade, he and his wife moved from town to town

seeking work to support the family while trying to attend college. Carver graduated from Humboldt State College (California) in 1963. In 1967, his short story "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" was published in *Best American Short Stories*—his first story to gain national recognition. As his publications and reputation as a writer began to grow, Carver was also dealing with growing alcoholism, brought on by the pressure to support a family while trying to write. Although many biographers have focused on Carver's propensity to drink (a habit he overcame by 1977), Carver's spare, spirited stories of modern working-class people are some of the best examples of a generation of American writing often called "minimalism"—a prose style "loosely characterized by equanimity of surface, 'ordinary' subjects, recalcitrant narrators and deadpan narratives, slightness of story and characters who don't think out loud" (Raymond Carver, 1994). His writings include the poetry collections *Near Klamath* (1968), *Winter Insomnia* (1970), and *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* (1985); and the short story collections *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), *Furious Seasons and Other Stories* (1977), *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories* (1983), and *Cathedral* (1983). "Signals," taken from *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, is a prime example of Carver minimalism.

Signals

(1976)

As their first of the extravagances they had planned for that evening, Wayne and Caroline went to Aldo's, an elegant new restaurant north a good distance. They passed through a tiny walled garden with small pieces of statuary and were met by a tall graying man in a dark suit who said, "Good evening, sir. Madam," and who swung open the heavy door for them.

Inside, Aldo himself showed them the aviary—a peacock, a pair of Golden pheasants, a Chinese ring-necked pheasant, and a number of unannounced birds that flew around or sat perched. Aldo personally conducted them to a table, seated Caroline, and then turned to Wayne and said, "A lovely lady," before moving off—a dark, small, impeccable man with a soft accent.

They were pleased with his attention.

"I read in the paper," Wayne said, "that he has an uncle who has some kind of position in the Vatican. That's how he was able to get copies of some of these paintings." Wayne nodded at a Velasquez reproduction on the nearest wall. "His uncle in the Vatican," Wayne said.

"He used to be *maître d'* at the Copacabana in Rio," Caroline said. "He knew Frank Sinatra, and Lana Turner was a good friend of his."

"Is that so?" Wayne said. "I didn't know that. I read that he was at the Victoria Hotel in Switzerland and at some big hotel in Paris. I didn't know he was at the Copacabana in Rio."

Caroline moved her handbag slightly as the waiter set down the heavy goblets. He poured water and then moved to Wayne's side of the table.

“Did you see the suit he was wearing?” Wayne said. “You seldom see a suit like that. That’s a three-hundred-dollar suit.” He picked up his menu. In a while, he said, “Well, what are you going to have?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I haven’t decided. What are you going to have?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I haven’t decided, either.”

“What about one of these French dishes, Wayne? Or else this? Over here on this side.” She placed her finger in instruction, and then she narrowed her eyes at him as he located the language, pursed his lips, frowned, and shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’d kind of like to know what I’m getting. I just don’t really know.”

The waiter returned with card and pencil and said something Wayne couldn’t quite catch.

“We haven’t decided yet,” Wayne said. He shook his head as the waiter continued to stand beside the table. “I’ll signal you when we’re ready.”

“I think I’ll just have a sirloin. You order what you want,” he said to Caroline when the waiter had moved off. He closed the menu and raised his goblet. Over the muted voices coming from the other tables Wayne could hear a warbling call from the aviary. He saw Aldo greet a party of four, chat with them as he smiled and nodded and led them to a table.

“We could have had a better table,” Wayne said. “Instead of right here in the center where everyone can walk by and watch you eat. We could have had a table against the wall. Or over there by the fountain.”

“I think I’ll have the beef Tournedos,” Caroline said.

She kept looking at her menu. He tapped out a cigaret, lighted it, and then glanced around at the other diners. Caroline still stared at her menu.

“Well, for God’s sake, if that’s what you’re going to have, close your menu so he can take our order.” Wayne raised his arm for the waiter, who lingered near the back talking with another waiter.

“Nothing else to do but gas around with the other waiters,” Wayne said.

“He’s coming,” Caroline said.

“Sir?” The waiter was a thin pock-faced man in a loose black suit and a black bow tie.

“. . . And we’ll have a bottle of champagne, I believe. A small bottle. Something, you know, domestic,” Wayne said.

“Yes, sir,” the waiter said.

“And we’ll have that right away. Before the salad or the relish plate,” Wayne said.

“Oh, bring the relish *tray*, anyway,” Caroline said. “Please.”

“Yes, madam,” the waiter said.

“They’re a slippery bunch,” Wayne said. “Do you remember that guy named Bruno who used to work at the office during the week and wait tables on weekends? Fred caught him stealing out of the petty-cash box. We fired him.”

“Let’s talk about something pleasant,” Caroline said.

“All right, sure,” Wayne said.

The waiter poured a little champagne into Wayne’s glass, and Wayne took the glass, tasted, and said, “Fine, that will do nicely.” Then he said, “Here’s to you, baby,” and raised his glass high. “Happy birthday.”

They clinked glasses.

“I like champagne,” Caroline said.

“I like champagne,” Wayne said.

“We could have had a bottle of Lancer’s,” Caroline said.

“Well, why didn’t you say something, if that’s what you wanted?” Wayne said.

“I don’t know,” Caroline said. “I just didn’t think about it. This is fine, though.”

“I don’t know too much about champagnes. I don’t mind admitting I’m not much of a . . . connoisseur. I don’t mind admitting I’m just a lowbrow.” He laughed and tried to catch her eye, but she was busy selecting an olive from the relish dish. “Not like the group you’ve been keeping company with lately. But if you wanted Lancer’s,” he went on, “you should have ordered Lancer’s.”

“Oh, shut up!” she said. “Can’t you talk about something else?” She looked up at him then and he had to look away. He moved his feet under the table.

He said, “Would you care for some more champagne, dear?”

“Yes, thank you,” she said quietly.

“Here’s to us,” he said.

“To us, my darling,” she said.

They looked steadily at each other as they drank.

“We ought to do this more often,” he said.

She nodded.

“It’s good to get out now and then. I’ll make more of an effort, if you want me to.”

She reached for celery. “That’s up to you.”

“That’s not true! It’s not me who’s . . . who’s . . .”

“Who’s what?” she said.

“I don’t care what you do,” he said, dropping his eyes.

“Is that true?”

“I don’t know why I said that,” he said.

The waiter brought the soup and took away the bottle and the wineglasses and refilled their goblets with water.

“Could I have a soup spoon?” Wayne asked.

“Sir?”

“A soup spoon,” Wayne repeated.

The waiter looked amazed and then perplexed. He glanced around at the other tables. Wayne made a shoveling motion over his soup. Aldo appeared beside the table.

“Is everything all right? Is there anything wrong?”

“My husband doesn’t seem to have a soup spoon,” Caroline said. “I’m sorry for the disturbance,” she said.

“Certainly. *Une cuiller, s’il vous plaît*,” Aldo said to the waiter in an even voice. He looked once at Wayne and then explained to Caroline. “This is Paul’s first night. He speaks little English, yet I trust you will agree he is an excellent waiter. The boy who set the table forgot the spoon.” Aldo smiled. “It no doubt took Paul by surprise.”

“This is a beautiful place,” Caroline said.

“Thank you,” Aldo said. “I’m delighted you could come tonight. Would you like to see the wine cellar and the private dining rooms?”

“Very much,” Caroline said.

“I will have someone show you around when you have finished dining,” Aldo said.

“We’ll be looking forward to it,” Caroline said.

Aldo bowed slightly and looked again at Wayne. “I hope you enjoy your dinner,” he said to them.

“That jerk,” Wayne said.

“Who?” she said. “Who are you talking about?” she said, laying down her spoon.

“The waiter,” Wayne said. “The waiter. The newest and the dumbest waiter in the house, and we got him.”

“Eat your soup,” she said. “Don’t blow a gasket.”

Wayne lighted a cigaret. The waiter arrived with salads and took away the soup bowls.

When they had started on the main course, Wayne said, “Well, what do you think? Is there a chance for us or not?” He looked down and arranged the napkin on his lap.

“Maybe so,” she said. “There’s always a chance.”

“Don’t give me that kind of crap,” he said. “Answer me straight for a change.”

“Don’t snap at me,” she said.

“I’m asking you,” he said. “Give me a straight answer,” he said.

She said, “You want something signed in blood?”

He said, “That wouldn’t be such a bad idea.”

She said, “You listen to me! I’ve given you the best years of my life. The best years of my life!”

“The best years of *your* life?” he said.

“I’m thirty-six years old,” she said. “Thirty-seven tonight. Tonight, right now, at this minute, I just can’t say what I’m going to do. I’ll just have to see,” she said.

“I don’t care what you do,” he said.

“Is that true?” she said.

He threw down his fork and tossed his napkin on the table.

“Are you finished?” she asked pleasantly. “Let’s have coffee and dessert. We’ll have a nice dessert. Something good.”

She finished everything on her plate.

“Two coffees,” Wayne said to the waiter. He looked at her and then back to the waiter. “What do you have for dessert?” he said.

“Sir?” the waiter said.

“Dessert!” Wayne said.

The waiter gazed at Caroline and then at Wayne.

“No dessert,” she said. “Let’s not have any dessert.”

“Chocolate mousse,” the waiter said. “Orange sherbet,” the waiter said. He smiled, showing his bad teeth. “Sir?”

“And I don’t want any guided tour of this place,” Wayne said when the waiter had moved off.

When they rose from the table, Wayne dropped a dollar bill near his coffee cup. Caroline took two dollars from her handbag, smoothed the bills out, and placed them alongside the other dollar, the three bills lined up in a row.

She waited with Wayne while he paid the check. Out of the corner of his eye, Wayne could see Aldo standing near the door dropping grains of seed into the aviary. Aldo looked in their direction, smiled, and went on rubbing the seeds from between his fingers as birds collected in front of him. Then he briskly brushed his hands together and started moving toward Wayne, who looked away, who turned slightly but significantly as Aldo neared him. But when Wayne looked back, he saw Aldo take Caroline’s waiting hand, saw Aldo draw his heels smartly together, saw Aldo kiss her wrist.

“Did madam enjoy her dinner?” Aldo said.

“It was marvelous,” Caroline said.

“You will come back from time to time?” Aldo said.

“I shall,” Caroline said. “As often as I may. Next time, I should like to have your permission to check things out a little, but this time we simply must go.”

“Dear lady,” Aldo said. “I have something for you. One moment, please.” He reached to a vase on a table near the door and swung gracefully back with a long-stemmed rose.

“For you, dear lady,” Aldo said. “But caution, please. The thorns. A very lovely lady,” he said to Wayne and smiled at him and turned to welcome another couple.

Caroline stood there.

“Let’s get out of here,” Wayne said.

“You can see how he could be friends with Lana Turner,” Caroline said. She held the rose and turned it between her fingers.

“Good night!” she called out to Aldo’s back.

But Aldo was occupied selecting another rose.

“I don’t think he ever knew her,” Wayne said.

Study and Discussion Questions

1. Give two reasons why this is an important evening for Wayne and Caroline.
2. Why is Wayne uncomfortable at Aldo’s? List three or four instances of his discomfort.

3. A good bit of the tension in Carver's story is expressed in terms of social class. In addition to the examples of Wayne's discomfort addressed in question 2, what is going on between Caroline and Wayne that has social class implications?
4. This is a marriage that seems to be in trouble. How do we know this? Do you think the marriage will survive? Why or why not?
5. What does the restaurant owner, Aldo, represent to Wayne? To Caroline?
6. Why is the story titled "Signals"? List as many signals in the story as you can find. What are these signals conveying?
7. The title of this story, "Signals," is a good word to describe Carver's signature literary style: "characterized by flatness of narrative tone, extreme sparseness of story, an obsession with the drab and quotidian, a general avoidance of extensive rumination on the page, and, in sum, a striking restraint in prose style. This movement, whose most notable practitioners also include Ann Beattie, Elizabeth Tallent, Tobias Wolff, Mary Robison, and Frederick Barthelme, is typically referred to as 'minimalism,' a designation that highlights the Spartan technique and the focus on the tiny fault lines that threaten to open out into violence or defeat" (Arthur Saltzman, *Understanding Raymond Carver*).

Give some examples in "Signals" of the characteristics of minimalism Saltzman mentions.

8. Carver himself comments, in a 1981 essay "On Writing," (*Fires*, 1983),

What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible actions of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things.

In "Signals," what is left out or implied?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Write a scene in a restaurant or at a dinner table that captures some conflict or tension in the participants/characters. Try to convey the conflict without *telling* us what it is.
2. Compare/contrast Carver's "Signals" with Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants." What do the two stories have in common in terms of situation and style? How do they differ?
3. Raymond Carver comments in "On Writing,"

It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring—with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader's spine. . . .

- a. Choose a passage in "Signals" and discuss Carver's use of language.
- b. Write a passage of prose or poetry yourself in which you consciously work at using "commonplace but precise language." Or revise a previous piece of writing of your own to achieve what Carver suggests.

Critical Resources

1. Kirk, Nessel. *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1995.
2. Meyer, Adam. *Raymond Carver*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.
3. *Short Cuts*. Director Robert Altman. Avenue Picture Productions, 1993. Based on the stories of Raymond Carver.
4. Stull, William, ed. *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990.



HISAYE YAMAMOTO (b. 1921)

*Hisaye Yamamoto was born in Redondo Beach, California, the daughter of immigrant farmers. While studying languages at Compton Junior College, Yamamoto, along with 100,000 other Japanese Americans, was interned in a wartime detention camp in Poston, Arizona, where she became friends with writer Wakabo Yamauchi ("And The Soul Shall Dance"). During her internment she began publishing stories for the Poston Chronicle. After her release, she started a family and worked as a journalist. In 1952, she declined a writing fellowship from Stanford University to work instead on a Catholic community farm on Staten Island, New York. Yamamoto gained national fame with the publication of her collected short stories *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* (1998), which was republished in 2001 with four new stories. The title piece of the collection (printed here) exemplifies Yamamoto's unique use of silence as a powerful means of communication.*

Seventeen Syllables

(1949)

The first Rosie knew that her mother had taken to writing poems was one evening when she finished one and read it aloud for her daughter's approval. It was about cats, and Rosie pretended to understand it thoroughly and appreciate it no end, partly because she hesitated to disillusion her mother about the quantity and quality of Japanese she had learned in all the years now that she had been going to Japanese school every Saturday (and Wednesday, too, in the summer). Even so, her mother must have been skeptical about the depth of Rosie's understanding, because she explained afterwards about the kind of poem she was trying to write.

See, Rosie, she said, it was a *haiku*, a poem in which she must pack all her meaning into seventeen syllables only, which were divided into three lines of five,

seven, and five syllables. In the one she had just read, she had tried to capture the charm of a kitten, as well as comment on the superstition that owning a cat of three colors meant good luck.

“Yes, yes, I understand. How utterly lovely,” Rosie said, and her mother, either satisfied or seeing through the deception and resigned, went back to composing.

The truth was that Rosie was lazy; English lay ready on the tongue but Japanese had to be searched for and examined, and even then put forth tentatively (probably to meet with laughter). It was so much easier to say yes, yes, even when one meant no, no. Besides, this was what was in her mind to say: I was looking through one of your magazines from Japan last night, Mother, and towards the back I found some *haiku* in English that delighted me. There was one that made me giggle off and on until I fell asleep—

I lie awake, comme il faut,
sighing for some dough.

Now, how to reach her mother, how to communicate the melancholy song? Rosie knew formal Japanese by fits and starts, her mother had even less English, no French. It was much more possible to say yes, yes.

It developed that her mother was writing the *haiku* for a daily newspaper, the *Mainichi Shimbun*, that was published in San Francisco. Los Angeles, to be sure, was closer to the farming community in which the Hayashi family lived and several Japanese vernaculars were printed there, but Rosie’s parents said they preferred the tone of the northern paper. Once a week, the *Mainichi* would have a section devoted to *haiku*, and her mother became an extravagant contributor, taking for herself the blossoming pen name, Ume Hanazono.¹

So Rosie and her father lived for awhile with two women, her mother and Ume Hanazono. Her mother (Tome Hayashi by name) kept house, cooked, washed, and, along with her husband and the Carrascos, the Mexican family hired for the harvest, did her ample share of picking tomatoes out in the sweltering fields and boxing them in tidy strata in the cool packing shed. Ume Hanazono, who came to life after the dinner dishes were done, was an earnest, muttering stranger who often neglected speaking when spoken to and stayed busy at the parlor table as late as midnight scribbling with pencil on scratch paper or carefully copying characters on good paper with her fat, pale green Parker.

The new interest had some repercussions on the household routine. Before, Rosie had been accustomed to her parents and herself taking their hot baths early and going to bed almost immediately afterwards, unless her parents challenged each other to a game of flower cards or unless company dropped in. Now if her father wanted to play cards, he had to resort to solitaire (at which he always cheated fearlessly), and if a group of friends came over, it was bound to

¹Ume, a flowering tree; Hanazono, a flower garden.

contain someone who was also writing *haiku*, and the small assemblage would be split in two, her father entertaining the nonliterary members and her mother comparing ecstatic notes with the visiting poet.

If they went out, it was more of the same thing. But Ume Hanazono's life span, even for a poet's, was very brief—perhaps three months at most.

One night they went over to see the Hayano family in the neighboring town to the west, an adventure both painful and attractive to Rosie. It was attractive because there were four Hayano girls, all lovely and each one named after a season of the year (Haru, Natsu, Aki, Fuyu²), painful because something had been wrong with Mrs. Hayano ever since the birth of her first child. Rosie would sometimes watch Mrs. Hayano, reputed to have been the belle of her native village, making her way about a room, stooped, slowly shuffling, violently trembling (*always* trembling), and she would be reminded that this woman, in this same condition, had carried and given issue to three babies. She would look wonderingly at Mr. Hayano, handsome, tall, and strong, and she would look at her four pretty friends. But it was not a matter she could come to any decision about.

On this visit, however, Mrs. Hayano sat all evening in the rocker, as motionless and unobtrusive as it was possible for her to be, and Rosie found the greater part of the evening practically anaesthetic. Too, Rosie spent most of it in the girls' room, because Haru, the garrulous one, said almost as soon as the bows and other greetings were over. "Oh, you must see my new coat!"

It was a pale plaid of grey, sand, and blue, with an enormous collar, and Rosie, seeing nothing special in it, said, "Gee, how nice."

"Nice?" said Haru, indignantly. "Is that all you can say about it? It's gorgeous! And so cheap, too. Only seventeen-ninety eight, because it was a sale. The saleslady said it was twenty-five dollars regular."

"Gee," said Rosie. Natsu, who never said much and when she said anything said it shyly, fingered the coat covetously and Haru pulled it away.

"Mine," she said, putting it on. She minced in the aisle between the two large beds and smiled happily. "Let's see how your mother likes it."

She broke into the front room and the adult conversation and went to stand in front of Rosie's mother, while the rest watched from the door. Rosie's mother was properly envious. "May I inherit it when you're through with it?"

Haru, pleased, giggled and said yes, she could, but Natsu reminded gravely from the door, "You promised me, Haru."

Everyone laughed but Natsu, who shamefacedly retreated into the bedroom. Haru came in laughing, taking off the coat. "We were only kidding, Natsu," she said. "Here, you try it on now."

After Natsu buttoned herself into the coat, inspected herself solemnly in the bureau mirror, and reluctantly shed it, Rosie, Aki, and Fuyu got their turns, and Fuyu, who was eight, drowned in it while her sisters and Rosie doubled up in

²Spring; Summer; Fall; Winter.

amusement. They all went into the front room later, because Haru's mother quaveringly called to her to fix the tea and rice cakes and open a can of sliced peaches for everybody. Rosie noticed that her mother and Mr. Hayano were talking together at the little table—they were discussing a *haiku* that Mr. Hayano was planning to send to the *Mainichi*, while her father was sitting at one end of the sofa looking through a copy of *Life*, the new picture magazine. Occasionally, her father would comment on a photograph, holding it toward Mrs. Hayano and speaking to her as he always did—loudly, as though he thought someone such as she must surely be at least a trifle deaf also.

The five girls had their refreshments at the kitchen table, and it was while Rosie was showing the sisters her trick of swallowing peach slices without chewing (she chased each slippery crescent down with a swig of tea) that her father brought his empty teacup and untouched saucer to the sink and said, "Come on, Rosie, we're going home now."

"Already?" asked Rosie.

"Work tomorrow," he said.

He sounded irritated, and Rosie, puzzled, gulped one last yellow slice and stood up to go, while the sisters began protesting, as was their wont.

"We have to get up at five-thirty," he told them, going into the front room quickly, so that they did not have their usual chance to hang onto his hands and plead for an extension of time.

Rosie, following, saw that her mother and Mr. Hayano were sipping tea and still talking together, while Mrs. Hayano concentrated, quivering, on raising the handleless Japanese cup to her lips with both her hands and lowering it back to her lap. Her father, saying nothing, went out the door, onto the bright porch, and down the steps. Her mother looked up and asked, "Where is he going?"

"Where is he going?" Rosie said. "He said we were going home now."

"Going home?" Her mother looked with embarrassment at Mr. Hayano and his absorbed wife and then forced a smile. "He must be tired," she said.

Haru was not giving up yet. "May Rosie stay overnight?" she asked, and Natsu, Aki, and Fuyu came to reinforce their sister's plea by helping her make a circle around Rosie's mother. Rosie, for once having no desire to stay, was relieved when her mother, apologizing to the perturbed Mr. and Mrs. Hayano for her father's abruptness at the same time, managed to shake her head no at the quartet, kindly but adamant, so that they broke their circle and let her go.

Rosie's father looked ahead into the windshield as the two joined him. "I'm sorry," her mother said. "You must be tired." Her father, stepping on the starter, said nothing. "You know how I get when its *haiku*," she continued, "I forget what time it is." He only grunted.

As they rode homeward silently, Rosie, sitting between, felt a rush of hate for both—for her mother for begging, for her father for denying her mother. I wish this old Ford would crash, right now, she thought, then immediately, no, no, I wish my father would laugh, but it was too late: already the vision had passed through her mind of the green pick-up crumpled in the dark against one of the mighty

eucalyptus trees they were just riding past, of the three contorted, bleeding bodies, one of them hers.

Rosie ran between two patches of tomatoes, her heart working more rambunctiously than she had ever known it. How lucky it was that Aunt Taka and Uncle Gimpachi had come tonight, though, how very lucky. Otherwise she might not have really kept her half-promise to meet Jesus Carrasco. Jesus was going to be a senior in September at the same school she went to, and his parents were the ones helping with the tomatoes this year. She and Jesus, who hardly remembered seeing each other at Cleveland High where there were so many other people and two whole grades between them, had become great friends this summer—he always had a joke for her when he periodically drove the loaded pick-up up from the fields to the shed where she was usually sorting while her mother and father did the packing, and they laughed a great deal together over infinitesimal repartee during the afternoon break for chilled watermelon or ice cream in the shade of the shed.

What she enjoyed most was racing him to see who could finish picking a double row first. He, who could work faster, would tease her by slowing down until she thought she would surely pass him this time, then speeding up furiously to leave her several sprawling vines behind. Once he had made her screech hideously by crossing over, while her back was turned, to place atop the tomatoes in her green-stained bucket a truly monstrous, pale green worm (it had looked more like an infant snake). And it was when they had finished a contest this morning, after she had pantingly pointed a green finger at the miniature tomatoes evident in the lugs at the end of his row and he had returned the accusation (with justice), that he had startlingly brought up the matter of their possibly meeting outside the range of both their parents' dubious eyes.

“What for?” she had asked.

“I’ve got a secret I want to tell you,” he said.

“Tell me now,” she demanded.

“It won’t be ready till tonight,” he said.

She laughed. “Tell me tomorrow then.”

“It’ll be gone tomorrow,” he threatened.

“Well, for seven hakes, what is it?” she had asked, more than twice, and when he had suggested that the packing shed would be an appropriate place to find out, she had cautiously answered maybe. She had not been certain she was going to keep the appointment until the arrival of mother’s sister and her husband. Their coming seemed a sort of signal of permission, of grace, and she had definitely made up her mind to lie and leave as she was bowing them welcome.

So as soon as everyone appeared settled back for the evening, she announced loudly that she was going to the privy outside, “I’m going to the *benjo!*” and slipped out the door. And now that she was actually on her way, her heart pumped in such an undisciplined way that she could hear it with her ears. It’s because I’m running, she told herself, slowing to a walk. The shed was up ahead,

one more patch away, in the middle of the fields. Its bulk, looming in the dimness, took on a sinisterness that was funny when Rosie reminded herself that it was only a wooden frame with a canvas roof and three canvas walls that made a slapping noise on breezy days.

Jesus was sitting on the narrow plank that was the sorting platform and she went around to the other side and jumped backwards to seat herself on the rim of a packing stand. "Well, tell me," she said without greeting, thinking her voice sounded reassuringly familiar.

"I saw you coming out the door," Jesus said. "I heard you running part of the way, too."

"Uh-huh," Rosie said. "Now tell me the secret."

"I was afraid you wouldn't come," he said.

Rosie delved around on the chicken-wire bottom of the stall for number two tomatoes, ripe, which she was sitting beside, and came up with a left-over that felt edible. She bit into it and began sucking out the pulp and seeds. "I'm here," she pointed out.

"Rosie, are you sorry you came?"

"Sorry? What for?" she said. "You said you were going to tell me something."

"I will, I will," Jesus said, but his voice contained disappointment, and Rosie fleetingly felt the older of the two, realizing a brand-new power which vanished without category under her recognition.

"I have to go back in a minute," she said, "My aunt and uncle are here from Wintersburg. I told them I was going to the privy."

Jesus laughed. "You funny thing," he said. "You slay me!"

"Just because you have a bathroom *inside*," Rosie said. "Come on, tell me."

Chuckling, Jesus came around to lean on the stand facing her. They still could not see each other very clearly, but Rosie noticed that Jesus became very sober again as he took the hollow tomato from her hand and dropped it back into the stall. When he took hold of her empty hand, she could find no words to protest; her vocabulary had become distressingly constricted and she thought desperately that all that remained intact now was yes and no and oh, and even these few sounds would not easily out. Thus, kissed by Jesus, Rosie fell for the first time entirely victim to a helplessness delectable beyond speech. But the terrible, beautiful sensation lasted no more than a second, and the reality of Jesus' lips and tongue and teeth and hands made her pull away with such strength that she nearly tumbled.

Rosie stopped running as she approached the lights from the windows of home. How long since she had left? She could not guess, but gasping yet, she went to the privy in back and locked herself in. Her own breathing deafened her in the dark, close space, and she sat and waited until she could hear at last the nightly calling of the frogs and crickets. Even then, all she could think to say was oh, my, and the pressure of Jesus' face against her face would not leave.

No one had missed her in the parlor, however, and Rosie walked in and through quickly, announcing that she was next going to take a bath. "Your

father's in the bathhouse," her mother said, and Rosie, in her room, recalled that she had not seen him when she entered. There had been only Aunt Taka and Uncle Gimpachi with her mother at the table, drinking tea. She got her robe and straw sandals and crossed the parlor again to go outside. Her mother was telling them about the *haiku* competition in the *Mainichi* and the poem she had entered.

Rosie met her father coming out of the bathhouse. "Are you through, Father?" she asked. "I was going to ask you to scrub my back."

"Scrub your own back," he said shortly, going toward the main house.

"What have I done now?" she yelled after him. She suddenly felt like doing a lot of yelling. But he did not answer, and she went into the bathhouse. Turning on the dangling light, she removed her denims and T-shirt and threw them in the big carton for dirty clothes standing next to the washing machine. Her other things she took with her into the bath compartment to wash after her bath. After she had scooped a basin of hot water from the square wooden tub, she sat on the grey cement of the floor and soaped herself at exaggerated leisure, singing "Red Sails in the Sunset" at the top of her voice and using da-da-da where she suspected her words. Then, standing up, still singing, for she was possessed by the notion that any attempt now to analyze would result in spoilage and she believed that the larger her volume the less she would be able to hear herself think, she obtained more hot water and poured it on until she was free of lather. Only then did she allow herself to step into the steaming vat, one leg first, then the remainder of her body inch by inch until the water no longer stung and she could move around at will.

She took a long time soaking, afterwards remembering to go around outside to stoke the embers of the tin-lined fireplace beneath the tub and to throw on a few more sticks so that the water might keep its heat for her mother, and when she finally returned to the parlor, she found her mother still talking *haiku* with her aunt and uncle, the three of them on another round of tea. Her father was nowhere in sight.

At Japanese school the next day (Wednesday, it was), Rosie was grave and giddy by turns. Preoccupied at her desk in the row for students on Book Eight, she made up for it at recess by performing wild mimicry for the benefit of her friend Chizuko. She held her nose and whined a witticism or two in what she considered was the manner of Fred Allen; she assumed intoxication and a British accent to go over the climax of the Rudy Vallee recording of the pub conversation about William Ewart Gladstone; she was the child Shirley Temple piping, "On the Good Ship Lollipop"; she was the gentleman soprano of the Four Inkspots³ trilling, "If I Didn't Care." And she felt reasonably satisfied when Chizuko wept and gasped, "Oh, Rosie, you ought to be in the movies!"

³Fred Allen (1894–1956), American radio and television humorist; Rudy Vallee, (1901–1986), American singer and bandleader; William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), nineteenth-century British prime minister; Shirley Temple (b. 1928), a child movie actor; Four Inkspots, American vocal quartet.

Her father came after her at noon, bringing her sandwiches of minced ham and two nectarines to eat while she rode, so that she could pitch right into the sorting when they got home. The lugs were piling up, he said, and the ripe tomatoes in them would probably have to be taken to the cannery tomorrow if they were not ready for the produce haulers tonight. "This heat's not doing them any good. And we've got no time for a break today."

It was hot, probably the hottest day of the year, and Rosie's blouse stuck damply to her back even under the protection of the canvas. But she worked as efficiently as a flawless machine and kept the stalls heaped, with one part of her mind listening in to the parental murmuring about the heat and the tomatoes and with another part planning the exact words she would say to Jesus when he drove up with the first load of the afternoon. But when at last she saw that the pick-up was coming, her hands went berserk and the tomatoes started falling in the wrong stalls, and her father said, "Hey, hey! Rosie, watch what you're doing!"

"Well, I have to go to the *benjo*," she said, hiding panic.

"Go in the weeds over there," he said, only halfjoking.

"Oh, Father!" she protested.

"Oh, go on home," her mother said. "We'll make out for awhile."

In the privy Rosie peered through a knothole toward the fields, watching as much as she could of Jesus. Happily she thought she saw him look in the direction of the house from time to time before he finished unloading and went back toward the patch where his mother and father worked. As she was heading for the shed, a very presentable black car purred up the dirt driveway to the house and its driver motioned to her. Was this the Hayashi home, he wanted to know. She nodded. Was she a Hayashi? Yes, she said, thinking that he was a good-looking man. He got out of the car with a huge, flat package and she saw that he warmly wore a business suit. "I have something here for your mother then," he said, in a more elegant Japanese than she was used to.

She told him where her mother was and he came along with her, patting his face with an immaculate white handkerchief and saying something about the coolness of San Francisco. To her surprised mother and father, he bowed and introduced himself as, among other things, the *haiku* editor of the *Mainichi Shim-bun*, saying that since he had been coming as far as Los Angeles anyway, he had decided to bring her the first prize she had won in the recent contest.

"First prize?" her mother echoed, believing and not believing, pleased and overwhelmed. Handed the package with a bow, she bobbed her head up and down numerous times to express her utter gratitude.

"It is nothing much," he added, "but I hope it will serve as a token of our great appreciation for your contributions and our great admiration of your considerable talent."

"I am not worthy," she said, falling easily into his style. "It is I who should make some sign of my humble thanks for being permitted to contribute."

"No, no, to the contrary," he said, bowing again.

But Rosie's mother insisted, and then saying that she knew she was being unorthodox, she asked if she might open the package because her curiosity was so

great. Certainly she might. In fact, he would like her reaction to it, for personally, it was one of his favorite *Hiroshiges*.⁴

Rosie thought it was a pleasant picture, which looked to have been sketched with delicate quickness. There were pink clouds, containing some graceful calligraphy, and a sea that was a pale blue except at the edges, containing four sampans with indications of people in them. Pines edged the water and on the far-off beach there was a cluster of thatched huts towered over by pine-dotted mountains of grey and blue. The frame was scalloped and gilt.

After Rosie's mother pronounced it without peer and somewhat prodded her father into nodding agreement, she said Mr. Kuroda must at least have a cup of tea after coming all this way, and although Mr. Kuroda did not want to impose, he soon agreed that a cup of tea would be refreshing and went along with her to the house, carrying the picture for her.

"Ha, your mother's crazy!" Rosie's father said, and Rosie laughed uneasily as she resumed judgment on the tomatoes. She had emptied six lugs when he broke into an imaginary conversation with Jesus to tell her to go and remind her mother of the tomatoes, and she went slowly.

Mr. Kuroda was in his shirtsleeves expounding some *haiku* theory as he munched a rice cake, and her mother was rapt. Abashed in the great man's presence, Rosie stood next to her mother's chair until her mother looked up inquiringly, and then she started to whisper the message, but her mother pushed her gently away and reproached, "You are not being very polite to our guest."

"Father says the tomatoes . . ." Rosie said aloud, smiling foolishly.

"Tell him I shall only be a minute," her mother said, speaking the language of Mr. Kuroda.

When Rosie carried the reply to her father, he did not seem to hear and she said again, "Mother says she'll be back in a minute."

"All right, all right," he nodded, and they worked again in silence. But suddenly, her father uttered an incredible noise, exactly like the cork of a bottle popping, and the next Rosie knew, he was stalking angrily toward the house, almost running in fact, and she chased after him crying, "Father! Father! What are you going to do?"

He stopped long enough to order her back to the shed. "Never mind!" he shouted. "Get on with the sorting!"

And from the place in the fields where she stood, frightened and vacillating, Rosie saw her father enter the house. Soon Mr. Kuroda came out alone, putting on his coat. Mr. Kuroda got into his car and backed out down the driveway onto the highway. Next her father emerged, also alone, something in his arms (it was the picture, she realized), and, going over to the bathhouse woodpile, he threw the picture on the ground and picked up the axe. Smashing the picture, glass and all (she heard the explosion faintly), he reached over for the kerosene

⁴Ando Hiroshige (1797–1858), wood block print artist.

that was used to encourage the bath fire and poured it over the wreckage. I am dreaming, Rosie said to herself, I am dreaming, but her father, having made sure that his act of cremation was irrevocable, was even then returning to the fields.

Rosie ran past him and toward the house. What had become of her mother? She burst into the parlor and found her mother at the back window watching the dying fire. They watched together until there remained only a feeble smoke under the blazing sun. Her mother was very calm.

“Do you know why I married your father?” she said without turning.

“No,” said Rosie. It was the most frightening question she had ever been called upon to answer. Don’t tell me now, she wanted to say, tell me tomorrow, tell me next week, don’t tell me today. But she knew she would be told now, that the telling would combine with the other violence of the hot afternoon to level her life, her world to the very ground.

It was like a story out of the magazines illustrated in sepia, which she had consumed so greedily for a period until the information had somehow reached her that those wretchedly unhappy autobiographies, offered to her as the testimonials of living men and women, were largely inventions: Her mother, at nineteen, had come to America and married her father as an alternative to suicide.

At eighteen she had been in love with the first son of one of the well-to-do families in her village. The two had met whenever and wherever they could, secretly, because it would not have done for his family to see him favor her—her father had no money; he was a drunkard and a gambler besides. She had learned she was with child; an excellent match had already been arranged for her lover. Despised by her family, she had given premature birth to a stillborn son, who would be seventeen now. Her family did not turn her out, but she could no longer project herself in any direction without refreshing in them the memory of her indiscretion. She wrote to Aunt Taka, her favorite sister in America, threatening to kill herself if Aunt Taka would not send for her. Aunt Taka hastily arranged a marriage with a young man of whom she knew, but lately arrived from Japan, a young man of simple mind, it was said, but of kindly heart. The young man was never told why his unseen betrothed was so eager to hasten the day of meeting.

The story was told perfectly, with neither groping for words nor untoward passion. It was as though her mother had memorized it by heart, reciting it to herself so many times over that its nagging vileness had long since gone.

“I had a brother then?” Rosie asked, for this was what seemed to matter now; she would think about the other later, she assured herself, pushing back the illumination which threatened all that darkness that had hitherto been merely mysterious or even glamorous. “A half-brother?”

“Yes.”

“I would have liked a brother,” she said.

Suddenly, her mother knelt on the floor and took her by the wrists. “Rosie,” she said urgently, “Promise me you will never marry!” Shocked more by the request than the revelation, Rosie stared at her mother’s face. Jesus, Jesus, she called silently, not certain whether she was invoking the help of the son of the Carrascos or of God, until there returned sweetly the memory of Jesus’ hand,

how it had touched her and where. Still her mother waited for an answer, holding her wrists so tightly that her hands were going numb. She tried to pull free. Promise, her mother whispered fiercely, promise. Yes, yes, I promise, Rosie said. But for an instant she turned away, and her mother, hearing the familiar glib agreement, released her. Oh, you, you, you, her eyes and twisted mouth said, you fool. Rosie, covering her face, began at last to cry, and the embrace and consoling hand came much later than she expected.

Study and Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the things that separate Rosie and her mother?
2. "Rosie and her father lived for awhile with two women, her mother and Ume Hanazono." What differences are there between these two sides of Rosie's mother?
3. List as many different things as you can that Mrs. Hayashi gets out of writing *haiku*.
4. Why is Rosie's father so bothered by his wife's interest in *haiku*?
5. What might Mrs. Hayano represent to Rosie? To Rosie's mother?
6. In what ways do social class and class differences enter into the lives of the characters in "Seventeen Syllables"?
7. Why does Rosie fear that the story of her mother's marrying will "level her life, her world to the very ground"?
8. What does Yamamoto achieve by telling this story from Rosie's point of view?
9. What are the meaning and significance of the last line of "Seventeen Syllables"?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Describe the various forces pushing on Rosie. Outline what you think the next five or ten years of her life might hold.
2. "Seventeen Syllables" was first published in 1949, not long after the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans. Does that history cast any shadow over the story?
3. Explicate the last paragraph of "Seventeen Syllables."

Critical Resources

1. Cheng, Ming. "The Unrepentant Fire: Tragic Limitations in Hisaye Yamaoto's 'Seventeen Syllables.'" *MELUS* Winter (1994): 91-107.
2. Cheung, King-Kok. *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P and UCLA, 2000.
3. King-Kok, Cheung. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamaoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993.
4. *Rabbit in the Moon*. (documentary) Director Emiko Omori. Wabi-Sabi Productions, 1999. See <<http://www.newday.com>> for more information.



CRISTINA GARCIA (b. 1958)

Born in Havana in 1958, during the Cuban Revolution, Cristina Garcia was taken to the United States by her parents at the age of two. Garcia grew up in Brooklyn and would receive her B.A. in political science from Barnard College in 1979, followed by a degree in Latin American Studies from John Hopkins in 1981. After spending several years as a reporter and researcher for Time magazine, Garcia resigned her position to write fiction full time. In 1993 she published her first novel, Dreaming in Cuban, which became a finalist for the National Book Award and established her as a respected contemporary novelist. Dreaming in Cuban was followed by The Aguero Sisters (1997) and Monkey Hunting (2003). These generational epics explore Cuban American identity (with a focus on the feminine) and are characterized by dramatic shifts from realism to magical realism. Garcia's poetic prose style eloquently shows the connections between history and character. "Inés in the Kitchen," one of her few short stories, was first published in Little Havana Blues: A Cuban-American Literature Anthology (1996).

Inés in the Kitchen

(1996)

Inés Maidique is twelve weeks pregnant and nauseous. Her back hurts, her breasts are swollen, and her feet no longer fit into her dressy shoes. Although she is barely showing, she walks around in sneakers to ease the soreness that has settled in every corner of her body. The eleven pounds she's gained feel like fifty.

When her husband returns home he'll expect her trussed up in a silk dress and pearls and wearing make-up and high heels. It's Friday and Richard likes for her to make a fuss over him at the end of the week. He'll be home in two hours so Inés busies herself preparing their dinner—a poached loin of lamb with mint chutney, cumin rice, ratatouille, and spiced bananas for dessert.

Richard will question her closely about what she's eaten that day. Inés will avoid telling him about the fudge cookies she devoured that morning in the supermarket parking lot. She hadn't wanted to eat the whole box, but bringing it home was unthinkable. Richard scoured the kitchen cabinets for what he called "illegal foods" and she was in no mood for his usual harangue.

With a long length of string Inés ties together the eye of loin and tenderloin at one inch intervals, leaving enough string at the ends to suspend the meat from the handles of the kettle. She slits the lamb in several places and inserts slivers of garlic. Then she sets about preparing the stock, skimming the froth as it simmers. Inés thinks about the initial excitement she'd felt when the blood test came back positive. She always knew, or thought she knew, she wanted a child, but now she is less certain.

The mint leaves give off a tart scent that clears her head with each pulse of the food processor. She adds fresh coriander, minced garlic, ginger root, honey, and a little lemon until the chutney congeals. Then she whisks it together with

plain yogurt in a stainless steel bowl. Inés remembers the abortion she'd had the month before her college graduation. She was twenty-one and, like now, twelve weeks pregnant. The baby's father was Cuban, like her, a hematology resident at the hospital where Inés was finishing her practicum. Manolo Espada was not opposed to having the baby, only against getting married. This was unacceptable to Inés. After the abortion, she bled for five days and cramped so hard she passed out. Inés spent the summer working a double shift at an emergency room in Yonkers. Her child would have been eight years old by now. Inés thinks of this often.

Shortly before she was to marry Richard, Inés tracked down her old lover to San Francisco, where he'd been doing AIDS research with an eminent name in the field. Over the phone, Manolo told her he was leaving for Africa the following month on a two-year grant from the Department of Health. Inés abruptly forgot everything she had planned to say. Even if she'd wanted him again, it was too late. She'd already sent out her wedding invitations and Richard had put a down payment on the colonial house across from the riding stables. Manolo was going to Africa. It would have never worked out.

Ratatouille is one of Inés's favorite dishes. It's easy to prepare and she cooks big batches of it at a time then freezes it. The red peppers give the ratatouille a slightly sweetish taste. Inés heats the olive oil in a skillet then tosses in the garlic and chopped onion. She adds the cubed egg-plants and stirs in the remaining ingredients one at a time. On another burner she prepares the rice with chicken broth, cuminseed, and fresh parsley. If she times it right, dinner will be ready just as Richard walks through the door.

Her husband doesn't know about Inés's abortion, and only superficially about Manolo Espada. It is better this way. Richard doesn't like it when Inés's attention is diverted from him in any significant way. How, she wonders, will he get used to having a baby around? Richard was the only boy in a family of older sisters, and accustomed to getting his way. His father died when Richard was eight and his three sisters had worked as secretaries to put him through medical school. Richard had been the great hope of the Roth family. When he told them he was marrying a Catholic, his mother and sisters were devastated. Janice, the oldest, told him point-blank that Inés would ruin his life. Perhaps, Inés thinks, his sister was right.

Inés strains the stock through a fine sieve into an enormous ceramic bowl, discarding the bones and scraps. She pours the liquid back into the kettle and turns on the burner to moderately high. Carefully, she lowers the lamb into the stock without letting it touch the sides or the bottom of the kettle, then she ties the string to the handles, and sets the timer for twelve minutes.

Other things concern Inés. She's heard about men running off when their wives become pregnant and she's afraid that Richard, who places such a premium on her looks, will be repelled by her bloating body. As it is, Inés feels that Richard scrutinizes her for nascent imperfections. He abhors cellulite and varicose veins, the corporal trademarks of his mother and sisters, and so Inés works hard to stay fit. She swims, plays tennis, takes aerobics classes, and works out

twice a week on the Nautilus machines at her gym. Her major weakness is a fondness for sweets. Inés loves chocolate, but Richard glares at her in restaurants if she so much as asks to see the dessert menu. To him a lack of self-discipline on such small matters is indicative of more serious character flaws.

What of her husband's good qualities? Richard takes her to the Bahamas every winter, although he spends most of the time scuba-diving, a sport which Inés does not share. And he is intelligent and well-informed and she believes he is faithful. Also, he isn't a tightwad like so many of her friends' husbands, watching every penny, and he doesn't hang out with the boys or play poker or anything like that. Richard is an adequate lover, too, although he lacks imagination. He likes what he likes, which does not include many of the things that Inés likes. Once, in bed, she asked Richard to pretend he was Henry Kissinger. The request offended him deeply. If Richard rejected so harmless a game, what would he say to the darker, more elaborate rituals she'd engaged in with Manolo?

The loin of lamb is medium rare, just the way Richard likes it. Inés lets it cool off on the cutting board for a few minutes before slicing it diagonally into thick, juicy slabs. She sets the table with their wedding linen and china and wedges two white candles into squat crystal holders. Inés thinks back on the five years she worked as a nurse. She was good at what she did and was sought after for the most important cardiology cases. More than one surgeon had jokingly proposed to her after she'd made a life-saving suggestion in the operating room. But like most men, they assumed she was unavailable. Someone so pretty, so self-contained, they thought, must already be spoken for.

When Richard first started working at the hospital, Inés felt drawn to him. There was something about his manner, about his nervous energy that appealed to her. It certainly wasn't his looks. Richard was skinny and tall with fleecy colorless hair, not at all like the mesomorphic Manolo whose skin seemed more of a pelt. For three months she and Richard worked side by side on coronary bypasses, ventricular aneurysm resections, mitral valve replacements. Their manner was always cordial and efficient, with none of the macabre bantering one often hears in operating rooms. One day, Richard looked up at her from a triple bypass and said, "Marry me, Inés." And so she did.

When Inés was a child, her father had predicted wistfully that she would never marry, while her mother seemed to gear her for little else. Inés remembers the beauty pageants she was forced to enter from an early age, the banana curls that hung from her skull like so many sausages. She'd won the "Little Miss Latin New York" pageant in 1964, when she was seven years old. Her mother still considers this to be Inés's greatest achievement. Inés had sung and played the piano to "Putting on the Ritz," which she'd translated to Spanish herself. Gerardo complained to his wife about sharing Inés with an auditorium full of leering strangers, but Haydée would not budge. "This is better than a dowry, Gerardo." But Gerardo preferred to have his daughter, dolled up in her starched Sunday dress and ruffled anklets, all to himself.

Gerardo expected Inés to drop everything to play the piano for him, and for many years she complied. This became more and more difficult as she got older.

Her parents separated and her father would call at all hours on the private phone line he'd installed in Inés's bedroom, pleading with her to come play the white baby grand he had rented just for her. Sometimes he would stroke her hair or tickle her spine as she played, tease her about her tiny new breasts or affectionately pat her behind. Inés remembers how the air seemed different during those times, charged and hard to swallow. Now her father is dead. And what, she asks herself, does she really know about him?

Inés turns off all the burners and pours herself a glass of whole milk. She is doing all the right things to keep the life inside her thriving. But she accomplishes this without anticipation, only a sense of obligation. Sometimes she has a terrible urge to pour herself a glass of rum, although she hates the taste, and she knows what it would do to the baby, or to burn holes in the creamy calfskin upholstery of her husband's sports car. Other times, mostly in the early afternoons, she feels like setting fire to the damask curtains that keep their living room in a perpetual dusk. She dreams about blowing up her herb garden with its fragrant basil leaves, then stealing a thoroughbred from the stable across the street and riding it as fast as she can.

Inés finishes the last of her milk. She rinses the glass and leans against the kitchen sink. There is a jingling of keys at the front door. Richard is home.

Study and Discussion Questions

1. What do we suspect about Inés's state of mind from the title and the opening sentence of the story?
2. List four or five significant *facts* we learn about Inés during the course of the story.
3. Who are the men in Inés's life that we hear about? Characterize her relation with each one.
4. How and why does being pregnant become a crisis point for Inés?
5. Garcia intersperses Inés's musings with vivid detailed paragraphs on what she is cooking for dinner. Why? What is the function of these paragraphs in the story? What effect do they have on the reader?
6. How does Inés feel about her pregnancy? Locate and discuss three passages in the story that may bear on her attitude toward being pregnant.
7. Discuss Inés's fantasies of escape in the second to last paragraph.
8. How might ethnicity be a factor in this story? Locate passages where Inés's Cuban identity (or her husband's Anglo identity) is explicitly or implicitly part of the story's tension.
9. Does Inés develop and change, however subtly, as the story progresses? Has she come to some realization by the end of the story?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Is Inés feeling trapped in her life? What evidence do you have either way? What do you think she will do next?
2. Write a postscript to "Inés in the Kitchen" set sometime later—you choose the time.

3. Write a couple of paragraphs from Richard's point of view.
4. Why and how do you think pregnancy is an important transitional event, perhaps even a rite of passage, in the lives of women? If you haven't been pregnant or had children yourself, talk to a few women who have gone through that experience and discuss with them any ponderings about or crises of identity they had during their pregnancy or any significant realizations they came to.
5. Is there a comparably significant "rite of passage" event in the lives of men? (This rite of passage doesn't have to be biological.) Discuss its components and compare to pregnancy as a rite of passage.

Critical Resources

1. Arujo, Nara. "I Came All the Way from Cuba So I Could Speak Like This? Cuban and Cuban- American Literatures in the US." *Comparing Post-colonial Literatures: Dislocations*. Ed. Ashok Bery. New York: Macmillan, St. Martin's, 2000.
2. Gomez-Vega, Ibis. "The Journey Home: Defining Identity in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*." *Voices: A Journal of Chicana/Latina Studies* 1.2 (1997): 71-100.
3. López, Iraida H. "'... And There Is Only My Imagination Where Our History Should Be': An Interview with Cristina García." *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*. Ed. Ruth Behar. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995. 102-114.



JOHN UPDIKE (b. 1932)

John Updike was born in Shilington, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Harvard in 1954 and then moved to Oxford, England, to study art for a year. He later returned to the United States to work for the New Yorker magazine, which began publishing his work. Updike eventually settled in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Updike's subjects are the values and problems of middle-class America. In this fiction, Updike seeks to problematize this seemingly mundane world, addressing such themes as family, religion, morality, sports, and the dynamics of intimate relationships. His novels include Rabbit, Run (1960), Couples (1968), Rabbit Redux (1971), Rabbit Is Rich (1981), The Witches of Eastwick (1984), Roger's Version (1986) and Rabbit at Rest (1990), In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996), and Gertrude and Claudius (2000). In "A & P," first published in Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories (1962), Updike's rare use of humor adds to the ambiguity of the story's meaning.