Other readers of literature hesitate over the concept of *literary analysis*, or at least over the word *analysis*. These readers complain that analysis will "tear the work apart" and "ruin it." If you are inclined to share this attitude, stop for a minute and think about the last sports event you watched. Do you remember thinking, "Davenport's going to serve wide and come in; she has to against Hingis." Or perhaps a friend explained: "North Carolina is so good at stalling to use up the clock; Duke will have to foul to get the ball and have a chance to tie the game." Both games are being analyzed! And that analysis makes each event more fully experienced by those who understand at least some of the elements of tennis or basketball.

The analogy is clear. You, too, can be a fan of literature. You can enjoy reading and discussing your reading once you learn to use your active reading and analytic skills to open up a poem or story, and once you sharpen your knowledge of literary terms and concepts so that you can "speak the language" of literary criticism with the same confidence with which you discuss the merits of a full court press or a drop volley.

GETTING THE FACTS: ACTIVE READING, SUMMARY, AND PARAPHRASE

Let's begin with the following poem by Paul Dunbar. As you read, make marginal notes, circling a phrase you fancy, putting a question mark next to a difficult line, underscoring words you need to look up. Note, too, your emotional reactions as you read.

PROMISE | PAUL LAWRENCE DUNBAR

Born of former slave parents, Dunbar (1872–1906) was educated in Dayton, Ohio. After a first booklet of poems, *Oak and Ivy*, was printed in 1893, several friends helped Dunbar get a second collection, *Majors and Minors*, published in 1895. A copy was given to author and editor William Dean Howells, who reviewed the book favorably, increasing sales and Dunbar's reputation. This led to a national publisher issuing *Lyrics of Lowly Life* in 1896, the collection that secured Dunbar's fame.

I grew a rose within a garden fair,
And, tending it with more than loving care,
I thought how, with the glory of its bloom,
I should the darkness of my life illume;
And, watching, ever smiled to see the lusty bud
Drink freely in the summer sun to tinct its blood.

My rose began to open, and its hue
Was sweet to me as to it sun and dew;
I watched it taking on its ruddy flame
Until the day of perfect blooming came,
Then hasted I with smiles to find it blushing red—
Too late! Some thoughtless child had plucked my rose and fled!

"Promise" should not have been especially difficult to read, although you may have paused a moment over "illume" before connecting it to "illuminate," and you may have to check the dictionary for a definition of "tinct." Test your knowledge of content by listing all the facts of the poem. Pay attention to the poem's basic situation. Who is speaking? What is happening, or what thoughts is the speaker sharing? In this poem, the "I" is not further identified, so you will have to refer to him or her as the "speaker." You should not call the speaker "Dunbar," however, because you do not know if Dunbar ever grew a rose.

In "Promise" the speaker is describing an event that has taken place. The speaker grew a rose, tended to it with care, and watched it begin to bloom; then, when the rose was in full bloom, some child picked the rose and took it away. The situation is fairly simple, isn't it? Too simple, unfortunately, for some readers who decide that the speaker never grew a rose at all. But when anyone writes, "I grew a rose within a garden fair," it is wise to assume that the writer means just that. People do grow roses, most often in gardens, and then the gardens are made "fair" or beautiful by the flowers growing there. Read first for the facts; try not to jump too quickly to broad generalizations.

As with nonfiction, one of the best ways to make certain you have understood a literary work is to write a summary or paraphrase. Since a summary condenses, you are most likely to write a summary of a story, novel, or play, whereas a paraphrase is usually reserved for poems or complex short passages. When you paraphrase a difficult poem, you are likely to end up with more words than in the original because your purpose is to turn cryptic lines into more ordinary sentences with normal word order. For example, Dunbar's "Then hasted I with smiles" can be paraphrased to read: "Then, full of smiles, I hurried."

When summarizing a literary work, remember to use your own words, draw no conclusions, giving only the facts, but focus your summary on the key events in the story. (Of course the selecting you do to write a summary represents preliminary analysis; you are making some choices about what is important in the work. The "steps" of observation, analysis, and interpretation do overlap.) Read the following short story by Langston Hughes and then write your own summary. Finally, compare yours to the summary that follows the story.

EARLY AUTUMN | LANGSTON HUGHES

Like many American writers, Langston Hughes (1902–1967) moved from the Middle West to New York City, lived and worked in France, and then returned to the United States to a career in writing. He was a journalist, fiction writer, and poet, the author of more than sixty books. The success of his novel *Not Without Laughter* (1930) secured his reputation and enabled him to become the first black American to support himself as a professional writer. Known as "the bard of Harlem," Hughes was an important public figure and voice for black writers. "Early Autumn" is reprinted from the collection *Something in Common* (1963).

When Bill was very young, they had been in love. Many nights they had 1
spent walking, talking together. Then something not very important had come

between them, and they didn't speak. Impulsively, she had married a man she thought she loved. Bill went away, bitter about women.

Yesterday, walking across Washington Square, she saw him for the first time in years.

"Bill Walker," she said.

He stopped. At first he did not recognize her, to him she looked so old.

"Mary! Where did you come from?"

Unconsciously, she lifted her face as though wanting a kiss, but he held out his hand. She took it.

"I live in New York now," she said.

"Oh"—smiling politely. Then a little frown came quickly between his eyes. "Always wondered what happened to you, Bill."

"I'm a lawyer. Nice firm, way downtown."

"Married yet?"

"Sure. Two kids."

"Oh," she said.

A great many people went past them through the park. People they didn't know. It was late afternoon. Nearly sunset. Cold.

"And your husband?" he asked her.

"We have three children. I work in the bursar's office at Columbia."

"You're looking very . . ." (he wanted to say *old*) ". . . well," he said.

She understood. Under the trees in Washington Square, she found herself desperately reaching back into the past. She had been older than he then in Ohio. Now she was not young at all. Bill was still young.

"We live on Central Park West," she said. "Come and see us sometime."

"Sure," he replied. "You and your husband must have dinner with my family some night. Any night. Lucille and I'd love to have you."

The leaves fell slowly from the trees in the Square. Fell without wind. Autumn dusk. She felt a little sick.

"We'd love it," she answered.

"You ought to see my kids." He grinned.

Suddenly the lights came on up the whole length of Fifth Avenue, chains of misty brilliance in the blue air.

"There's my bus," she said.

He held out his hand. "Good-by."

"When . . ." she wanted to say, but the bus was ready to pull off. The lights on the avenue blurred, twinkled, blurred. And she was afraid to open her mouth as she entered the bus. Afraid it would be impossible to utter a word.

Suddenly she shrieked very loudly, "Good-by!" But the bus door had closed.

The bus started. People came between them outside, people crossing the street, people they didn't know. Space and people. She lost sight of Bill. Then she remembered she had forgotten to give him her address—or to ask him for his—or tell him that her youngest boy was named Bill, too.

Summary of "Early Autumn"

Langston Hughes's short story "Early Autumn" is about two people, Mary and Bill, who were in love once but broke up and did not speak to each other. Mary married someone else "impulsively" and does not see Bill again until one late afternoon, years later, in New York City's Washington Square. When Mary speaks, Bill does not at first recognize her. They discuss their jobs, their marriages, their children. When Mary invites Bill to visit, he says "Sure" and that she should have dinner with his family sometime. When Mary's bus arrives and she gets on, she has trouble speaking. She realizes that they have not set a date or exchanged addresses. She has also forgotten to tell him that her youngest son is named Bill.

Note that the summary is written in the present tense to recount the events that take place during the time of the story. Brevity is achieved by condensing several lines of dialogue into a statement such as "they discuss their jobs." Notice, too, that the summary is not the same as the original; the emotions of the characters, conveyed through what is said—and not said—are missing.

Now for a paraphrase. Read the following sonnet by Shakespeare, looking up unfamiliar words and making notes. Remember to read to the end of a unit of thought, not just to the end of a line. Some sentences continue through several lines; if you pause before you reach punctuation, you will be confused. Write your own paraphrase, not looking ahead in the text, and then compare yours with the one that follows the poem.

SONNET 116 | WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Surely the best-known name in literature, William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is famous as both a dramatist and a poet. Rural Warwickshire and the market town of Stratford-on-Avon, where he grew up, showed him many of the character types who were to enliven his plays, as did the bustling life of a young actor in London. Apparently his sonnets were intended to be circulated only among his friends, but they were published nonetheless in 1609. His thirty-seven plays were first published together in 1623. Shakespeare's 154 sonnets vary, some focusing on separation and world-weariness, others on the endurance of love.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Paraphrase of "Sonnet 116"

I cannot accept barriers to the union of steadfast spirits. We cannot call love love if it changes because it discovers change or if it disappears during absence. On the contrary, love is a steady guide that, in spite of difficulties, remains unwavering. Love can define the inherent value in all who lack self-knowledge, though superficially they know who they are. Love does not lessen with time, though signs of physical beauty may fade. Love endures, changeless, eternally. If anyone can show me to be wrong in this position, I am no writer and no man can be said to have loved.

We have examined the facts of a literary work, what we can call the internal situation. But, as we noted in Chapter 2, there is also the external situation or context of any piece of writing. For many literary works, the context is not as essential to understanding as it is with nonfiction. You can read "Early Autumn," for instance, without knowing much about Langston Hughes, or the circumstances in which he wrote the story, although such information would enrich your reading experience. There is a body of information, however, that is very important, what we can call the external literary situation. Literary externals are those basic elements of a work that readers should take note of before they begin to read.

REMEMBER: Active reading includes looking over a work first and predicting what will come next. Do not just start reading words without first understanding what kind of work you are about to read.

Let's review some of these essentials.

- First, don't make the mistake of calling every work a "story." When you read—and then later discuss—literature, make clear distinctions among stories, novels, plays, and poems.
- Poems can be further divided into narrative, dramatic, and lyric poems.
- A *narrative poem*, such as Homer's *The Iliad*, tells a story in verse. A *dramatic poem* records the speech of at least one character.
- A poem in which only one figure speaks—but clearly addresses words to someone who is present in a particular situation—is called a *dramatic monologue*.
- *Lyric poems*, Dunbar's "Promise," for example, may place the speaker in a situation or may express a thought or feeling with few, if any, situational details, but lyric poems have in common the convention that we as readers are listening in on someone's thoughts, not listening to words directed to a second, created figure. These distinctions make us aware of how the words of the poem are coming to us. Are we hearing a storyteller or someone speaking? Or, are we overhearing someone's thoughts?

Lyric poems can be further divided into many subcategories or types. Most instructors will expect you to be able to recognize some of these types. You should be able to distinguish between a poem in *free verse* (no prevailing metrical pattern) and one in *blank verse* (continuous unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter.) (Note: A metrical line will contain a particular number—pentameter is five—of one kind of metrical "foot." The iambic foot consists of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable.) You should also be able to tell if a poem is written in some type of *stanza* form (repeated units with the same number of lines, same metrical pattern, and same rhyme scheme), or if it is a *sonnet* (always fourteen lines of iambic pentameter with one of two complex rhyme schemes labeled either "English" or "Italian"). You want to make it a habit to observe these external elements before you read. To sharpen your observation, complete the following exercise.

EXERCISE: Observing Literary Types and Using Literary Terms

1. After surveying this appendix, make a list of all the works of literature by primary type: short story, poem, play.
2. For each work on your list, add two additional pieces of information: whether the author is American or British, and in what century the work was written. Why should you be aware of the writer's dates and nationality as you read?
3. Further divide the poems into narrative, dramatic, or lyric, as appropriate.
4. List as many of the details of type or form as you can for each poem. For example, if the poem is written in stanzas, describe the stanza form used: the number of lines, the meter, the rhyme scheme. If the poem is a sonnet, determine the rhyme scheme. (Note: Rhyme scheme is indicated by using letters, assigning "a" to the first sound and using a new letter for each new sound. Thus, if two consecutive lines rhyme, the scheme is *aa, bb, cc, dd,* and so on.)

SEEING·CONNECTIONS: ANALYSIS

Although we read first for the facts and an initial emotional response, we do not stop there, because as humans we seek meaning. Surely there is more to "Early Autumn" than the summary suggests; emotionally we know this to be true. As with nonfiction, one of the best places to start analysis is with a work's organization or structure. Lyric poems will be shaped by many of the same structures found in essays: chronological, spatial, general to particular, particular to general, a list of particulars with an unstated general point, and so forth. In

"Promise," Dunbar gives one illustration, recounted chronologically, to make a point that is left unstated. "Sonnet 116" contains a list of characteristics of love underscored in the conclusion by the speaker's conviction that he is right.

Analysis of Narrative Structure

In stories (and plays and narrative poems) we are given a series of events, in time sequence, involving one or more characters. In some stories, episodes are only loosely connected but are unified around a central character (Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for example). Most stories present events that are at least to some extent related causally; that is, action A by the main character leads to event B, which requires action C by the main character. This kind of plot structure can be diagrammed, as in Figure 1.

Figure 1 introduces some terms and concepts useful in analyzing and discussing narratives. The story's *exposition* refers to the background details needed to get the story started, including the time and place of the story and relationships of the characters. In "Early Autumn" Hughes begins by telling us that the action will take place in lower Manhattan, late in the afternoon, between a man and a woman who had once loved each other. The *complication* refers to an event; something happens to produce tension or conflict. In "Early Autumn" the meeting of Mary and Bill, after many years, could be an occasion for joy but seems to cause a complication instead. Mary expects to be kissed but Bill merely offers his hand; Bill smiles "politely" and then frowns. The meeting becomes a complication for both characters because it generates a *conflict* within each character. Bill's conflict seems the more manageable; he turns on his polite behavior to get through the unexpected encounter. Mary is more upset; seeing Bill makes her feel old, and she is hardly able to speak when she boards the bus. A key question arises: Why is Mary so upset?

Although some stories present one major complication leading to a climactic moment of decision or insight for the main character, many actually repeat the pattern, presenting several complications—each with an attempted resolution that generates yet another complication—until we reach the high point of tension, the *climax*. The climax then generates the story's *resolution* and ending. These terms are useful even though some stories end abruptly without having much resolution. An abbreviated resolution is part of the modern writer's view

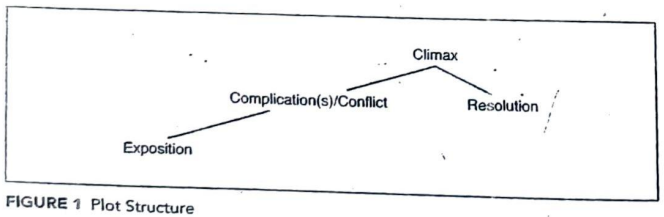

FIGURE 1 Plot Structure

of reality, that life goes on, with problems remaining unresolved. The climax in "Early Autumn" comes when Mary boards her bus and then realizes that she will once again be separated from Bill. This story's climax is muted and merges quickly into the resolution of the last line. The ending offers little genuine resolution; our recognizing this fact helps us better understand the story.

Analysis of Character

An analysis of plot structure has shown that Mary is the more troubled character. You should recognize that Mary is not in conflict *with* Bill but rather is in conflict *over* him, or over her feelings for him, still strong in spite of years of a life without him. Note the close connection between complication (event) and conflict (what the characters are feeling). Fiction requires both plot and character, events and players in those events. In serious literature the greater emphasis is usually on character, on what we learn about human life through the interplay of character and incident.

As we shift attention from the plot of "Early Autumn" to the characters, it helps to consider how writers present character. Writers have several techniques for conveying character:

- Descriptive details. (Bill's polite smile followed by a frown.)
- Dramatic scenes. (Instead of telling us, they show us. Most of "Early Autumn" consists of dialogue between Mary and Bill.)
- Contrast among characters. (We have already observed that Mary and Bill react differently to their encounter.)
- Other elements in the work. (Names can be significant, or characters can become associated with objects, or details of setting can become symbolic.)

Understanding character is always a challenge because we must infer from a few words, gestures, and actions. Looking at all of a writer's options for presenting character will keep us from overlooking important details.

Analysis of Elements of Style and Tone

Important elements in "Early Autumn" include the time of day and the title. How are they connected? What do they suggest about the characters? All the elements, discussed in Chapter 2, that shape a writer's style and create tone can be found in literary works as well and need to be considered as a part of your analysis. Hughes's title is actually a metaphor and, reinforced by the late-in-the-day meeting, suggests that this meeting comes too late for Mary to regain what she has lost—her youth and her youthful love. Shakespeare's "Sonnet 116" develops the speaker's ideas about love through a series of metaphors. The rose in Dunbar's "Promise," is not a metaphor, though, because it is not part of a comparison. Yet, as we read "Promise" we sense that the poem is about something more serious than the nurturing and stealing of one flower, no matter how beautiful. Again, this work's title gives us a clue that the rose stands for something more than itself; it is a symbol. Traditionally the red rose