Extensive reading (**All lectures**)

Prof. Handour

Course objectives:

By the end of the semester, the students should be able to:

1. Scheme and scan the literary reading material listed below to get familiar with its content.
2. Critically engage with the assigned short stories and poems.
3. Extracts and discuss the main themes of each literary work.
4. Be familiar with some distinctive features and artistic devices of literary discourse.
5. Analyse a literary excerpt and develop a theme into a well-written four paragraph essay.

Short stories:

1. "Young Goodman Brown" by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1835).
2. "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe (1843).
3. "Clay" by James Joyce (1914).
4. "Her First Ball" by Katherine Mansfield (1921).
5. "The Duchess and the Jeweller" by Virginia Wolf (1938).
6. "Flight" by John Steinbeck (1938).

Poems:

1. "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats.
2. "The Journey of the Magi" by T.S Eliot.
3. "Sonnet 18" by Shakespeare.
4. "Ode to a Nightingale" by John Keats.
5. "She Walks in Beauty" by Lord Byron.
6. "Daffodils" By William Wordsworth.

Towards a definition of literature:

"Literature" has been defined in a number of different ways, which makes it a highly polysemic signifier. For this reason, it is not a simply- defined, but rather a fuzzy multi-dimensional concept. In simple words, literature designates a kind of imaginative and creative writing closely bound up with fiction, which is a kind of literally untrue writing.

Seventeenth century English literature encompasses Shakespeare, Webster, Marvell and Melton; but it also includes the essays of Francis Bacon, the sermons of John Donne and the various writings of Thomas Browne.

Trying to understand literature against the backdrop of the paired opposite of fact and fiction is nonetheless problematic. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the novel seems to have been concerned with both fact and fiction whereas the news reports were hardly if ever concerned with factual events. Hence the dividing line between fact and fiction has always been shadowy and vague and "our own sharp discriminations between these categories simply did not apply" (Eaglton 2). For instance, Gibbon, who thought that he was essentially engaged in writing "historical truth" and the authors of Genesis, who believed that whatever they have written refers to univocal religious facts, are now read as fact by some readers and fiction by others. In the same vein, Newman's theological meditations are not unanimously read as a repository of unchanging truth, but they can be, cogently enough, approached as literature. Therefore, any attempt to draw a clear-cut distinction between fact and fiction cannot work in the sphere of literature. What we take for fiction can be construed as something factual and what we regard as fact can be interpreted as something fictional.

This being the case, one needs to look for an alternative approach to literature. Perhaps we need to define literature not only as imaginative or creative writing, but also as a kind of writing which uses language in "peculiar ways". In this regard, literary writing goes beyond imagination and creation to perpetrate, in the words of the Russian formalist critic Roman Ja Jakobson, an "organized violence" on "ordinary speech." Literature has the potential to transform ordinary language into something unfamiliar. In his book, A Defence of Poetry, (1821), Shelly anticipates this formalist contention of defamiliarization since for him poetry "strips the veil of familiarity from the world ... it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity ... It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know."25 if, for example, you come to me and

utter 'Thou still unravished bride of quietness', then I instantly know that I am in the presence of the literary. This sense of unfamiliarity is attributable to the texture, rhythm and resonance of the words, which are steeped in abstract meanings. Put differently, this defamiliarization is due to the absence of proportion between the signifiers (the material elements of language) and the signifieds (the mental image/ concept).

Russian Formalists:

To the Russian formalist and New American literary critics, the advocates and upholders of close reading, literature should remain disinterested. That is to say, the literary text should be politically detached and unconcerned with any "specific program of action". The main goal of literary criticism according to Mathew Arnold, a key canonical figure in the British criticism, is that of merely appreciating "the object as in itself it really is." The literary text is at variance with religion, psychology and sociology and solely represents a certain peculiar organization foisted on everyday speech. It has its own laws, structures and devices, which should be subjected to rigorous critical analysis without stretching far beyond to some transcendental truth. In other words, the text is self-referential as it is both apolitical and ahistorical. It is neither a vehicle for ideas, nor a reflection of social, cultural, psychological or political reality. It is a self-sufficient autotelic entity.

For a formalist critic Henry Fielding's novel *Joseph Andrews* is not about a character of that name. It is just a means to an end. It is a device for holding different kinds of the narrative technique together. Likewise *Nineteen Eighty Four* would not be read as a castigation of the totalitarian oligarchy and its power machines, but as a self-contained text that has nothing to do with ideology and politics. On this theory, Eaglton points out:

> What was specific to literary language, what distinguished it fromother forms of discourse, was that it 'deformed' ordinary language in various ways. Under the pressure of literary devices, ordinary language was intensified, condensed, twisted, telescoped, drawn out, turned on its head. It was language 'made strange'; and because of this estrangement, the everyday world was also suddenly made unfamiliar. (Eaglton 7)

The alienating and estrangement effect literature exerts on ordinary language must be underlined. Paradoxically, it is when the veil of familiarity is stripped of language that a more intimate possession of experience occurs. Unlike natural science and biology textbooks, for instance, the language that literature implements serves a general rather than an immediate or specific purpose. These non-pragmatic overtones bring formalist critics under scathing critical attacks from their opponents who argue, convincingly enough, that literary language is populated with our social, cultural and political concerns. For their turn, many formalist critics do not deny that history and politics may interfere with literature, but the critic's business does not consist in stretching to facts that lie outside the text. This focus on how literary discourse works rather than what it is about further accentuates the formalist claim that literature inaugurates a sort of self-referential language that talks about nothing, but itself.

Notwithstanding this non- pragmatic approach to literary discourse, it is still rather intractable to define literature objectively. Its definition remains open-ended as it depends on how somebody decides to read rather than on the nature of the reading material. This claim is redolent of Barthesian (in relation to Roland Barthes) notion of the death of the author which paves the way to the birth of the reader and consequently to myriad interpretations of the literary text. "There are certain kinds of writing - poems, plays, novels - which are fairly obviously intended to be 'non-pragmatic' in this sense, but this does not guarantee that they will actually be read in this way" (Eaglton 7). I might read George Orwell not because some of his novels provide information about totalitarian political regimes like those of Stalin, but because I derive sheer joy and pleasure from reading this paramount literary figure. According to Eaglton, "Some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them. Breeding in this respect may count for a good deal more than birth"(Ibid). literature is in dearth of essence. A literary text may be read "non-pragmatically" as it may be read "poetically." What people generally call literature is sometimes based on their idiosyncratic judgment:

> We have still not discovered the secret, then, of why Lamb, Macaulay and Mill are literature but not, generally speaking, Bentham, Marx and Darwin. Perhaps the simple answer is that the first three are examples of 'fine writing', whereas the last three are not. This answer has the disadvantage of being largely untrue, at least in my judgement, but it has the advantage of suggesting that

> by and large people term 'literature' writing which they think is *good.* (Eaglton 8/9)

Still the term “fine writing”, the equivalent of *“belles lettres”* in French, is not devoid of ambiguity: it designates a kind of writing which is highly esteemed, while not forcing you into regarding a specimen of it to be good. Literature is not fixed, but rather dynamic; it is in a constant state of flux. What was regarded as literature in one historical epoch may not be regarded as such in the next, and vice versa. In this respect, Eaglton is right to interrogate a Marxist value judgment about Greek art:

> Karl Marx was troubled by the question of why ancient Greek art retained an 'eternal charm', even though the social conditions which produced it had long passed; but how do we know that it will remain 'eternally' charming, since history has not yet ended? Let us imagine that by dint of some deft archaeological research we discovered a great deal more about what ancient Greek tragedy actually meant to its original audiences, recognized that these concerns were utterly remote from our own, and began to read the plays again in the light of this deepened knowledge. One result might be that we stopped enjoying them. We might come to see that we had enjoyed them previously because we were unwittingly reading them in the light of our own preoccupations; once this became less possible, the drama might cease to speak at all significantly to us. (10)

Young Goodman Brown analysis

Context:

"**Young Godman Brown**" is a story[1] told in retrospection[2]. In the title Young Goodman Brown, "**Brown**" is the character's surname[3]; "**Goodman**[4]" is a form of address and "**Young**" serves to differentiate the son from the father and forefather[5], who were also known as Goodman Brown.

The historical context:

Puritanism was a 16th and 17th century **reform movement**[6] whose main goal was to purge[7] the Church of England from the legacy of Catholicism. The extremism inherent in Puritanism among other factors kindled civil war and turmoil[8] in England. Under the pernicious[9] effect of persecution some Puritans fled[10] in the 17th century in quest of[11] a safe haven in the American colonies, creating puritan settlements in towns such as Salem, Massachusetts…

Puritans had a strong conviction that they had covenant[12] with God. Their belief in predestination -- *the doctrine that God has ordained everything that will happen, especially with regard to the salvation of some and not others*-- made them think they had been selected as godly people who were redeemed. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who believed in the sinful nature of men, uses the story of Young Goodman Brown as an allegory of the **Fall of Men** which represented the Original Sin. Unlike Hester Prynne (The protagonist of "The Scarlet Letter"), who survives through the ignominious[13] ordeal[14] of her sinful experience and achieves a kind of 19th century Transcendentalist redemption by devoting her life to serving fellow humans, Young Goodman Brown godliness[15] is marred[16] by doubt and suspicion (*his dying hour was gloom*).

Hawthorne's scathing rebuke[17] of the Puritans, including his forefathers, is due to their fanatic and extremist beliefs and their vilification and oppression of anyone who thinks differently from them. Having been victims of persecution in England, they turned out victimizers in New England. They tortured and hanged the Quakers (also known as the Religious Society of Friends, they are united by their common belief in each person's ability to experience the light within or see "that of God in everyone").

The founder of the Quaker movement was called **George Fox**. The early Quakers were believed to sit in silence and meditate on the words of the Bible until they felt the

inner light of God shining upon them. Among those hanged was **Mary Dyer** (1611 – 1660), who repeatedly defied a puritan law banning Quakers from Massachusetts Bay colony. She was one of the four executed Quakers known as the Boston martyrs. The Puritans assassinated thousands of Native Americans in battles and set fire in their settlements killing women, children, and elders in **king Phillip**'s war between 1675 and 1676. In the tumultuous upheaval generated by **Cotton Mather** (1636 – 1728) (a new England puritan minister and prolific writer of both books and pamphlets). The Puritans convicted 33 accused witches, hanging 19 of them and pressing to death elderly **Giles Corey** (1611-1692) (English born farmer who was accused by witchcraft along with his wife **Martha Corey** during the Salem witch trials).

In his oeuvre **Hawthorne** portrays most of the atrocities committed by colonial Puritans denouncing their violence as antithetical to Christian's ideals. He is pretty aware that the hands of his **Hathorne** ancestors were tainted with the blood of Quakers, witches and the native Indians. One of the godfathers of the Transcendentalist movement is **Ralph Waldo Emerson**. He was known for his criticism of the scientific cause-and-effect model embraced by rational philosophers at Harvard University. Central to this movement is the idea that humans could transcend the rationalist world of facts and materialism through intellect, intuition and a deep affinity with nature. The tenets of Transcendentalism are put forward in his work "**Nature**" in 1836 and the magazine "the **Dial**". Emerson became the mainstay of the **Transcendentalist enclave of Concord**, often financially supporting **Henry David Thoreau**, **Bronson Alcott** and **Hawthorne** (and their families) with wealth obtained from his late wife and speaking fees.

Vocabulary:

(1) **Story**: tale.
(2) **Retrospection**: written in the past tense.
(3) **Surname**: family name.
(4) **Goodman**: like Mister.
(5) **Forefather**: ancestor.
(6) **Reform movement**: حركة إصلاحية
(7) **Purge**: purify.
(8) **Turmoil**: chaos.
(9) **Pernicious**: negative.
(10) **Fled**: escaped.

(11) **In quest of**: seeking.
(12) **Covenant**: Agreement.
(13) **Ignominious**: shameful.
(14) **Ordeal**: bad experience.
(15) **Godliness**: piety (التقوى).
(16) **Scathing rebuke**: severe criticism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne biography:

Nathaniel Hawthorne was known as dark romantic author. Most of his allegorical narratives are set in New England, often in the 17th century. Writing in the romantic era, Hawthorne focuses on the common rather than the special men, prioritising the emotional over the rational and pushing against the order and formality of classicism and Neoclassicism and questioning reason of the Enlightenment. Hawthorne accentuates the flawed, depraved (corrupt), and sinful aspects of human nature. He strives to lay bare the hypocrisy behind the moral rigor of the godly Puritans, many of whom suffered unspeakable (cannot be described) religious persecution and consequently they fled to New England where they established an extreme religious fiefdom in the 1600s. Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1804 to a family that struck deep roots in the 17th century New England. When he was only four years old, his father passed away and his mother shouldered the responsibility of his upbringing. Hawthorne wanted to separate himself from his ancestors by adding "W" to the original family name **Hathorne**. Hawthorne felt ashamed of the atrocities committed by his family in the past and connected their subsequent decline with their sins. One was a magistrate who sentenced a Quaker woman to public flogging (whipping) as did Goodman Brown grandfather in the story: "**I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem**". One more ancestor was a judge who sentenced many women to death during the 1692 Salem witch trials. Being unable to let go of these binding ties, though disgraceful, Hawthorne was obsessed with the history of his family, a facet of which is related in "Young Goodman Brown". This story was one among many other literary products of 12 years of relative seclusion in his mother's attic where he dedicated his time to reading and learning the art of writing.

Theoretical background:

… Making illusion to “Young Goodman Brown” and the set of earlier stories, he noted: “These stories were published… without making… the slightest impression on the public”. Over the years praise from the literary lights of his time did nothing to shake his modesty. Hawthorne declared that he was sometimes at a loss to what his tales mean. In 1854 he wrote to a friend: “Upon my honour, I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories, but I remember that I always had a meaning, or at least thought I had.

Today Hawthorne continues to be universally praised as the godfather of American literature. His work **withstands** (resists to) the test of time and is still popular. Renowned contemporary writer Stephen King wrote his horror story “the Man in the Black Suit” to pay homage to “Young Goodman Brown”, one of his favourite tales. He described Hawthorne piece as one of the ten best stories ever written by an American.

In 1837, Hawthorne published his first collection of stories “Twice Told Tales”, which bestow some fame on him as a writer. Though he relished fleeting (short-lived) moments of success **in the wake** (after) of publishing his stories, he hardly made a living out of them. As a result, he spent one year working in the Boston Custom House, weighing salt and coal. 1842 marked his marriage to Sophia Peabody; the couple had three children. They rented the Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts the stronghold of the transcendentalist movement presided by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott.

In 1846, Hawthorne reunited with Salem, where he was appointed surveyor of the Custom House. After being released from duty due to a change in power, he quickly wrote “The Scarlet Letter” (1850) in which the female protagonist (Hester Prynne) is disgraced and stigmatised for having committed adultery.

The narrative codes

This brief essay represents a critical attempt to analyze Nathaniel I Hawthorn's "Young Goodman Brown" in light of a set of narrative codes put forward by a number of narrative theory scholars.

I. An account of the narrative in the light of Barthes' narrative codes:

Roland Barthes describes a text as:

"**a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible. We gain access to it by several entrances; none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can read, they are indeterminable ... The systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed...** " (S/Z-1974 translation).

According to Barthes, the text is open to plural interpretations and the codes we can base our analysis on are indeterminable. However, we will content ourselves with the five codes he has suggested:

- **The hermeneutic code**: (It embodies those elements of a text that create an enigma and suspense leading us to ask questions): At first sight, the title triggers off a set of questions: why does the author use one of his characters as a title? What makes him special in his eye? Does Goodman as a title that evokes feelings of courtesy and respect chime in with the actions of Mr. Brown? Also, the introductory moments of the story might lead the reader to raise such questions as: why does Young Goodman Brown insist that he should go on a journey to the forest? Why does he obstinately refuse to put off or cancel this nocturnal journey in spite of his wife's plea to spend the night by her side? Why does the journey take place at night and not in daytime?

As the plot unfolds, further questions can be raised: Why is Brown intercepted by the Devil? What is the rationale behind this nocturnal journey? To what extent can one infer that it is an eyeopener for young Goodman Brown? This is but a sample of questions that an individual reader might ask as he reads the tale, and since we are different readers — or more pertinently cultural constructs — the questions that are likely to be raised will always remain governed by indeterminacy. The potentially infinite range of questions one might ask lends some credence to Roland Barthes claim "that the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."

- ***The semic:*** (*connotative code*) (it has to do with the second order of signification using hints or flickers of meaning). It is evident that Young Goodman Brown occupies a special place in the story that uses his name as a title. He is the protagonist whose

actions and movements attract the reader's attention. However, the position he is initially granted in the tale turns out to be ironic, especially when he finds it difficult to ward off the temptation of taking part in the suspicious celebrations away from the village. The forest, which is the destination of his journey, appeals to him though the puritans have always denigrated it as a place of the devil where the Indians practice their pagan rites. Also, his encounter with the devil undermines his status as a protagonist whose name brings to mind such qualities as religiosity and piety. Much to his chagrin, his ancestors, who have always set a good example for him, turn out to be the devil's disciples. Their past, of which he is implicitly proud, is a source of disgrace, ignominy and infamy. The last straw for Goodman Brown is his Faith taking part in the evil festivities. Though the scene of her participation is somehow ambiguous given that the reader is at a loss whether the journey is real or not — in fact it might be construed as a dream — the allegorical overtones of Faith as a character make the reader infer that the protagonist's faith hangs in the balance.

- **The proairetic code:** the ability to determine the result of an action within logico-temporal constraints). The nocturnal journey from the village to the forest is meant to lay bare the hidden face of Puritanism.

Young Goodman Brown, who may pride himself on his lineage, is placed in close proximity to some distinguished ancestors whose notorious crimes disappoint any positive image he may have of them. The journey, though frustrating, is an eye-opener that introduces Goodman Brown to the ugly face of the 17th century New England Puritans. When his wite entreats him to change his mind and spend that particular night with her, we begin, as readers, to suspect the perils of a journey whose ultimate destination and the circumstances surrounding it do not augur well for our protagonist. Moreover, the future of Faith, whose husband bids farewell to her, is thrust into uncertainty since the forest is a frightening place and home to the devil and his associates. The first dialogue between husband-and-wife heralds Goodman Brown's unsafe return from the forest, which has always been associated with evil in the Puritans' imaginary.

- **The Symbolic code:** Generates a structure of symbolic meanings (sometimes in the form of paired opposites) that evolve into a larger structure in which the meanings of the story are conveyed.

From the outset of the story, the writerly reader comes across a set of symbols that serve to covey layers of meaning. The parting kiss can be interpreted as Faith's sense of foreboding that her husband is about to embark upon a perilous journey from the

village where he is safe to the woods where he will be in danger of being devoured by evil forces. Placing the village in immediate juxtaposition with the forest also betokens the duality of religiosity and paganism. While the village is home to the « pious », the forest is the dwelling place of « the devil ». This asymmetric duality unveils further secrets about Puritanism. It is in the forest, which is the object of suspicion, where Young Goodman Brown is revealed the harsh reality of his pedigree's disgraceful mode of 1ife. The forest therefore discloses the religious cant of the Puritans, who fail to live to up to their religious teachings.

➢ **The Cultural Code*:*** this code produces a structure in which the text points out common bodies of knowledge. This shared knowledge may take on the form of axiomatic truths. It is commonly believed that a journey into the forest is a hazardous adventure, especially because Young Goodman Brown sets Off in the dark alone. Also, hypocrisy and sin are symptomatic of human frailty and fallibility across cultures and religions.

II. Greimas' Actantial Model

In Structural semantics, the actantial model, or the actantial narrative schema is a tool used for the analysis of the action that takes place in a narrative, be it fictional or factual. It was put forward in 1966 by semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas.

This narrative schema differentiates characters according to the role they are assigned in the plot.

The model distinguishes between

- Subject / Object
- Helper / Opponent
- Sender / Receiver
- Power

The subject craves an **object**. **The helper** assists **the subject** in his pursuit of **the object**. **The opponent** tries to prevent **the subject** from obtaining **the object**. **The sender** initiates the action and **the receiver** benefits from the action and/ or the object. The subject's success, or otherwise, in gaining the desired **object** depends on the abstract **power** often related to **the subject**. The analysis of the characters according to Greimas's actantial narrative schema is conducive to categorizing the characters within the plot according to their functions.

➢ **Subject/object:** The subject is Young Goodman Brown. He obstinately sticks to his decision to attain his object against all odds. Faith's plea to him to stay and share

her solitude is merely thrust aside. The object attainment requires undergoing a journey that may jeopardize the subject's life and smear his reputation as a devout Puritan religionist; however, the experience is too tempting to resist. The point of departure is Salem, a village held in esteem for its « Godly » people, and the point of arrival is the forest, where evil is believed to be rampant. The subject's unflinching enthusiasm — paradoxically enough — begins to increasingly diminish in the moments subsequent to his encounter with the fifty-year old man. He is seized by consecutive bouts of hysteria laughing at times and screaming at others as if haunted by the demons of the forest. Under the cumbersome load of guilt and remorse, Young Goodman Brown becomes sceptical of the distant echoes of his laughter and shouts suspecting that the various elements of nature are mocking him. Apparently, he attains his object, especially when he finds out — much to his dismay — that the outward guise of truth is no more than a lie. Though the journey is scary and perilous, its outcome is enlightening for the protagonist because he acquires new information and realities about his Puritan pedigree and compatriots. He becomes aware of their pretentious religious beliefs that are verily founded on hypocrisy and lies. Though disheartened by the obtained object, because his Faith is probably present at the blasphemous ceremony, Young Goodman Brown is also disillusioned by the high ranked religious authorities of present and past Salem.

- **Helper:** It would sound ironic to regard Faith as the opponent and the fifty-year old man who meets Goodman Brown in the forest as the helper. It seems that Nathaniel Hawthorne deliberately resorts to the reversal of roles in order to suggest that man's disposition towards sin is difficult to deter. Though Faith is chosen as the opponent on the grounds that she vainly attempts to prevent Goodman Brown from making a journey into the forest, her aim is noble and laudable. Conversely, the old man is assigned the role of the helper though his intentions are vile and immoral. He encourages Goodman Brown and motivates him to proceed with his walk, especially when he begins to be gripped by undeclared feelings of guilt and remorse. Though he admits to having scruples, he cannot ward off the temptation of taking part in the communion service (the Christian ceremony in which people eat bread and drink wine in memory of Christ's death.) Hawthorne ironically utilizes the old man, who subsequently turns out to be the devil, as the helper in order to unveil the hidden truth of 17th century New England Puritanism.
- **Opponent:** with sheer reticence we can consider Faith, the newly married wife, as the opponent of the subject. She is worried about her husband, who is determined

to go on an errand, whose purpose the narrator already describes as evil. Tacitly, Faith is also afraid of losing her husband; that's why, she implores him to keep her company and share her loneliness, but to no avail. The subject triumphs over his opponent, who shows little resistance to preclude his nocturnal journey to the forest. Be that as it might, Hawthorne introduces the opponent in ambivalent terms. Indeed, ambivalence pervades the whole story and sometimes interferes with the decidability of meaning. As a case in point, the opening dialogue reveals Faith as a caring wife — though she does her utmost to prevent her husband from attaining his object — who is sceptical about the outcome of a perilous journey taking place at night. We are confused about her function in the tale: we cannot decide for certain if she is the opponent because she desires to keep her husband from travelling to the forest or the helper who is concerned for his future given that Faith is an allegorical embodiment of religiosity.

- **Sender/Receiver:** Though we are baffled about the cause of the journey and, by implication, the exact nature of the sender, we can pertinently surmise that the irresistible call of temptation is what Goodman Brown cannot turn down. The sender is not a fictional character, but the instinct of a human being who is suddenly obsessed with an invincible propensity for putting to the test the dogmas of faith and exploring part of reality that lies hidden in the forest. Apparently, Nathaniel Hawthorne deliberately avoids assigning the role of the sender to a human being in order to suggest that our instinctual drives can occasionally determine our actions and shape our behaviour. Since the sender cannot be concretized in the form of flesh and blood character, anyone — Hawthorne seems to suggest — is liable to be seduced into committing a sin or being involved in any evil act regardless of how much 'pious' s/he is believed to be.

The indeterminacy of a sender and receiver also lends credence to the ambiguous dimension of Hawthorne's oeuvre in general, and this tale in particular.

Even if the receiver's identity is likewise clamped tight in the embrace of ambivalence whose echoes reverberate in the whole narrative, we can assign this role to the old man and the congregation in the forest. The first receiver of Goodman Brown is the enigmatic old figure who subsequently turns out to be the devil. He makes it easy for him to access the satanic assembly, which might be seen as a second receiver. Goodman Brown undergoes the demeaning experience of witnessing eminent religious authorities, including his teacher of catechism, taking part in the festivities overseen by the devil.

III. Todorov's Equilibrium Model:

- **Equilibrium: (A state of order, peace and serenity)**

The protagonist relishes a passing moment of emotional and psychological equilibrium at the outset of the story. His enthusiasm for and persistence in embarking upon the nocturnal journey bespeak his strong desire to attend the assembly ignoring his wife's plea for postponing his plan. He reassures Faith that no harm will befall her and advises her to go to bed at dusk and repeat her prayers. Finally, Faith's premonition abates when she gives assent to his departure wishing him a safe return.

- **Disrupted Equilibrium/ Disequilibrium: (balance and equilibrium are disrupted)**

Goodman Brown' s encounter with the fifty-year old man marks a turning point in his journey. At this juncture, his psychological and emotional state begin to lose their sense of equilibrium. When the old man proves to be the devil, Goodman Brown's peace of mind gradually deserts him. He is seized by sudden hysterical outbursts when the devil informs him that he has befriended his ancestors and drunk communion wine with one of them. The sight of Faith among the devil's guests disrupts what is left of Goodman Brown's emotional stability.

- **New Equilibrium: (A new state of equilibrium and balance)**

One of the redeeming features of the journey is Brown's return to the village with a new vision. He is likely to experience a new equilibrium back in the village. He has become aware of the sinful nature of Salem's celebrities; the fact that they are anathema to him means that he has not altogether lost his faith. This claim acquires credibility when he earnestly exhorts his wife not to succumb to the Wicked One. Though the new equilibrium is somehow tormenting because Goodman Brown no longer trusts his Puritan brethren and their religious rites, it serves to open his eyes to the frailty of human beings at large.

IV. Levi Straus's Binary Opposition:

Binary opposites serve to draw a dividing line between antithetical categories. These dualities and divisions contribute to imparting meaning to the story and evincing its ironic tones. One of the salient territorially polarizations is that of the village versus the forest. Hawthorne satirizes the notion of the village as a sacred location wherein the Puritans of 17th century New England foreground public morality and background private religious faith. The corruptibility inherent in the Puritan religious doctrine is therefore rooted in Salem, which paradoxically amounts to a holy site in the eye of

religious and political officials. On the other hand, the forest is branded as a place of heathenism and sacrilege. This dichotomous rendering of reality lays bare the ideology of Puritanism and destabilizes its mythical essence. The implication is that the public morality associated with Salem is a lie since the forest reveals the hidden face of Puritanism.

In the same vein, Faith is initially presented as the antithesis of her husband. She is the embodiment of self-restraint as she curbs any desire that might drive her to accompany her husband to the wilderness. She does her utmost to preclude the journey, but in vain. At this juncture, one might identify with her as someone capable of abstaining from the temptation of getting involved in any sinful act that would shake the seemingly righteous grounds on which she stands. On the other hand, Young Goodman Brown has no scruples to part with Faith feeling certain that his stay in the forest will be short-lived. Ironically, a reversal of roles occurs when Goodman Brown witnesses his wife in the forest and does his best to protect her from the Wicked One.

- Another important binary opposition is constituted by the religious authorities pertaining to the village and the devil incarnated in the fifty-year old man. Hawthorne deliberately brings both parties together and by so doing he fuses religion with sacrilege. Those who lead the congregation in the village are shown to be under the leadership of the devil in the nocturnal assembly.

The analysis of this tale is conducted against the backdrop of Barthes' narrative codes, Greimas's actantial narrative schema, Todorov's equilibrium model, and Straus's binary oppositions. Adopting these codes and models serves to decode and construct the narrative's meaning. Far from being fixed, this meaning is plural. That's why, the text is open to a potentially infinite range of interpretations using this limited number of codes and models.

N.B: The students are required to apply these codes and models to the other short stories scheduled for this semester.

"**The Black Cat**" (Edgar Alan Poe)

Essay one:

Critical analysis of the final part of the story:

In this final part of the story the narrator admits his failure to bring his wrath under control. Indeed, he has always been shown to be at the mercy of psychopathic violence, one of the main themes of the story. It becomes clear that the thin thread that ties him to the world of humanity is becoming flimsier as he fails to tame the unruly beast that misguides his actions. He seems to foreground human frailty and sorrow when he displays himself to be trapped in a maze where the exit to safety and peace of mind is hard to be found. He is gripped by extreme irrationality and wildness that catapult him to a space located far beyond the boundaries of humanity. In fact, his psychological state acquires significance, especially when he is depicted to be more beastly and savage than the helpless beasts that have to bear the brunt of his mood swings.

The narrator's relationship with the second cat and his wife is marked by turbulence and upheaval that reveal the plight of a man wrestling with mental derangement in a society that claims to cater for the needs of its people. Through the eyes of the unnamed narrator the author levels bitter criticism against the American society where people are clamped tight in the grip of poverty and psychological unrest. The narrator is both victim and victimizer in this Gothic tale of terror. He cannot eschew alcoholism because he is short of any other socially accepted alternative that will assuage his alienation and solitude. In other words, he is let down by a society where the slogans of welfare and prosperity reverberate across the globe. This is probably why Edgar Allan Poe scoffs at the American democracy and brands it as mob rule. His inauguration of the Gothic genre in his writings is meant to underline the horror that impacts the characters and the reading public as well.

The terror that coincides with the narrator's loss of the little humanity left in him manifests in the failed attempt to kill the cat while burying the axe in his wife's head. The woman who is lumped with the cat is not an accidental occurrence. She is reduced to the level of the animal by divesting her of a voice. She is a mere wall of silence and her interference to save the cat seals her final doom. All through the story the reader is allowed no chance to hear her voice. This male objectification of women recurs in Edgar Allan Poe's works and means that women are dehumanized to the core. Worst of all, the indifference and cold blood with which he kills his wife bespeak the narrator's excessive misogyny.

Homework: Choose an extract from one of the stories programmed for this semester and analyze it using appropriate and accurate English.

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Essay 2:

Even though the unnamed narrator confesses that remorse finds no way to his heart, his claim is open to doubt. The second cat that takes after Pluto to a great extent with the only difference of a white splotch on his fur can be taken as a mere apparition produced by a consciousness grappling with the cumbersome weight of guilt. It is therefore more of an illusion than reality. This interpretation is subsequently confirmed when we are told that the speckle of white is gradually transformed into the image of the gallows, the structure where the hanging takes place. The harrowing scenery of hanging a beloved cat from the limb of a tree remains engraved in the narrator's inner mind though he repeatedly introduces himself to be untouched by the atrocity he has committed. Indeed, Poe experiments with first person narration and shows the unsettling effects of an unreliable narrator whose precipitous decline into madness undermines his own version of the events while implying another.

The versatile and inconsistent nature of the narrator is probably meant to explore the macabre side of the human nature. In the opening paragraph of the story, he owns up to his sanity excluding any temptation on the part of the reading public to incarcerate him in the claustrophobic embrace of madness. Still the language he uses to relate his ordeal fails to capture the essence of a narrative that shows resistance to conceptual clarity. This undecidability of meaning is partly reflected in the fact that the boundaries that divide one thing from another are shadowy and vague. This paradoxical trafficking in binary polarities has something to do with the writer's aversion to facile categorization. For instance, we are not sure whether the second cat really exists because it is the exact replica of Pluto. What is strange —and this is one of the features of the gothic —is the idea that it is without an eye. In the same vein, Edgar Allan Poe is penchant for overturning expectations and flouting conventions. The reader is unlikely to anticipate the emergence of a cat that has almost everything in common with its previous counterpart. Since this accident is incredible, the reader has the right to construe the second cat against the backdrop of a dreamy world of hallucinations and illusions.

Amidst all these particulars, the tale subscribes to the 'unity of impression', which Edgar Allan Poe upholds in 'Philosophy of composition.' This means that every element of the story should work toward creating the same effect in the reader. This effect is the unspeakable horror the events produce through shock. The bestiality that accompanies the killing of Pluto to appease the narrator's irrational whims bespeaks subversive actions of death, dissolution and decomposition, all of which constitute the basic foundation of the Gothic tale of terror.

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Essay Three:

Having murdered his wife, the narrator starts thinking of how to conceal the evidence of the hideous atrocity. In cold blood, he carefully sets out to consider a variety of options to dispense with the body of a helpless human being. The irrational savagery that surrounds the act of killing confers a typically Gothic touch on the story and places the criminal somewhere beneath the realm of humanity. Madness comes to a temporary halt to allow reason to function in the negative direction. Removing the body out of the house cannot work according to the narrator's reasonable calculations because he would run the risk of being noticed by the neighbours. Dismemberment is also considered, but soon avoided in favour of casting the body in the well in the yard. He finally settles on walling it up in the cellar.

The woman who is depicted as the most patient of sufferers is lumped with the cat that seems -mysteriously enough- to be moved by the calamity that has befallen her. Animals in Edgar Allan Poe's writings signal the absence of human reason and morality, but sometimes humans prove less rational than their beastly counterparts. The savage irrationality of the crime baffles the police, who cannot conceive of a motiveless crime or understand the brutal force involved. The role reversal -irrational humans versus rational animals- indicates that the author considers murder a fundamentally animalistic, and therefore inhuman, act.

The murder of a woman who intervenes to save the cat from the uncontrollable violence of the narrator divests the latter of the little human reserve he could have. His extreme misogyny progresses into the callous act of killing. Initially, the wife is relegated to the subordinated margins of humanity. She is silenced and muted in such a way that she cannot use the language to defend herself or display a reaction against the violent outbursts of her husband. This male objectification of a woman, who has remained anonymous and lethargic throughout the story, reaches its apex when the axe is buried in her brain. The psychopathic violence that produces shock through horror reflects not only the plight of the individual victim and victimizer, but also the unhealthy social circumstances in a whole society.

The air of bliss and euphoria with which he has completed the act of hiding the body reveals him to be a fiend in the guise of a human being. He makes all the necessary arrangements to avoid being caught and punished. He is egoistically concerned with his safety showing a sense of self-confidence when he has finally dispensed with the body. There is some grim humor in his unsuccessful attempt to find the cat that has mysteriously slept over the corpse. Ironically, the pleasure he experiences at its disappearance will turn into an arcane sensation of horror when the cat's sound is heard following the act of tapping the wall. This sound shocks the reading public and gives away the murderer.

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