TO A DAUGHTER LEAVING HOME:

This poem, “To a Daughter Leaving Home” by Linda Pastan, shows an emotional relation between a parent and a daughter. It makes you think about how our own parents are feeling about us and how soon time will come of when we are all grown up and independent. Soon we will part from our own parents and move on into a bigger world. The poem depicts that parents and children need to let go of each other in order for them to grow.

In “To a Daughter Leaving Home”, Pastan uses the “bicycle” as a symbol to show the challenges of life, and the growth of the daughter. “When I (as a parent) taught you (my daughter) at eight to ride a bicycle” the daughter “wobbled away”, not yet fully controlling the bicycle, which is referring to not yet mature enough to live independently, and needs help or support whenever in a difficult situation, like a little child relying on their mom or dad for help. But when the daughter “pulled ahead down the curved path of the park”, the daughter was actually able to ride the bicycle and go faster than the parent. The “curved path of the park” also shows the challenges of life, how it is very challenging for the daughter to ride the path, but she was able to ride through. She was able to solve the challenges or problems in life by herself and move on. The parent “kept waiting for the thud, of the crash”, a moment when the daughter comes back for help to the parent to solve the issue, but the daughter “grew smaller and more breakable with distance” referring that the daughter did not rely on her parent and continued her independent life. In the end, the parent had to stop chasing after the daughter. This conveys the worry of the parent and the growth of the daughter. The parent finally figures out that his/her daughter needs no more help from them and it was time to let go. It leaves a sense of sadness and loneliness and you can actually feel the pain of the parent, letting go of the one you love. It makes you think about how you have to go through this pain and overcome it when you are a parent.

The poem creates an imagery of the story, with detailed descriptions like “my own mouth rounding in surprise”. Besides imagery, Pastan includes onomatopoeias such as “wobbled”, “thud”, “crash”, “pumping”, “flapping”, to describe the situation in a realistic way and she uses a simile, “like a handkerchief waving goodbye” to finish the poem, and leaves a melancholy atmosphere or mood to the readers which is really effective and keeps you thinking of what you may experience, or what you have experienced.

ANALYSIS OF POEM:

To A Daughter Leaving Home is a poem that describes the memory of a mother teaching her young daughter to ride a bicycle.

The contrasts are clear - the title suggests that her daughter is now old enough to leave home, yet the poem concentrates on the past, when she was only a child. The poet carefully and cleverly extends the metaphor of the bike as part of life's journey.

Linda Pastan's poems are often windows into domestic life at all levels, taking in husband and wife issues, the difficulties of motherhood and the complex relationships between family members.

To A Daughter Leaving Home focuses on a particular aspect of family life, learning to ride a bike, something we've all had a go at, and turns this simple experience into a threshold moment.

The tension created between mother and daughter comes and goes as the narrative progresses, taking the reader right into the action, whilst the metaphorical undercurrents allow for reflection and reaction.

The mother's love for her child comes through, the imagery stays strong, but learning how to cope with that same child as an adult is always more of a challenge.

THE WIFE:

This story is instructive as a pure example of Victorianism, reduced in literary value by its adherence to the conventions of popular culture: “The Wife” was politically correct in 1819. It is like an embroidered sampler on a cozy wall of home sweet home.

Irving wrote to please genteel married women, the great majority of his readers. He caters to their view of themselves, introducing his story with a quotation exalting “women’s love” and the bliss of domestic life. He follows that with an opening paragraph heaping more praises on “the softer sex” for their strength, fortitude, resilience and “intrepidity”--their ability to survive “disasters which break down the spirit of a man and prostrate him in the dust.” Men fall prostrate while women have such an “elevation to their character that at times it approaches sublimity.” This imagery, in the tradition of Medieval chivalry, defines the Victorian paradigm of gender roles in marriage: attributing “sublimity” to the wife, who is idealized as an iconic Angel in the House.

Just as modern readers are conditioned by political correctness to make stock responses, Victorians were conditioned by stories such as this one. After the 1960s, the Victorian paradigm was replaced by the Feminist paradigm of gender roles. The new political correctness turned many traditional values into taboos, such as the mutual dependence of husband and wife. Consequently, most readers today are disconnected from the Victorian deification of women and are shocked and offended by the second paragraph of this story. Some readers are so unfamiliar with the past they cannot imagine it. Gasping, they infer that the second paragraph just has to be satire. On the contrary, a Victorian wife would not have resented being represented in metaphor as a clinging vine, because she was also empowered in marriage with the moral authority of an Angel:

As the vine, which has long twined its graceful foliage about the oak and been lifted by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling around it with its caressing tendrils and bind up its shattered boughs, so is it beautifully ordered by Providence, that women, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity, winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart.

This second paragraph is a single periodic sentence, a branching metaphor that expresses mutual dependency, with emphasis on the emotional dependence of a husband on a wife. This is the message wives wanted to hear. And still do. That they are needed, that they are indispensable, even that they are divine. The metaphor is drawn from Nature, which is “ordered by Providence”--by Almighty God--and is the basis for Victorian gender roles. In the real world of 1819, women on the whole were in fact dependent on men, the great majority of whom were farmers. Wives and husbands are business partners on a farm. Crèvecoeur records in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) that whereas European women worked alongside men in the fields, as soon as they could American farmers freed their wives from hard labor to make the home a heaven on earth.

Irving’s “The Wife” is not a farm wife with modest agrarian values, she is urban upper class. The story is a soap opera that dramatizes the conflict between pastoral values--simplicity, peace and love in the countryside, the Garden (or suburbs)--and the puritan values of money and status attained through competition and dedication to business in the City. Like soap operas in the 20th century, this one is pitched mainly to a middle-class audience of women who aspire to be upper class. Accordingly, the worst disaster they can imagine is a loss of status. Most women secured and improved their status through marriage like

the wife of Leslie in the story. He has an “ample” fortune, but she has none, like Lily Bart in The House of Mirth (1905) by Edith Wharton.

The second paragraph expresses the perspective of an ideal Victorian husband: Prostrate before his wife’s sublimity in the first paragraph, in the second he is a strong oak tree that lifted her into sunshine. The Victorian husband was expected to be a strong provider outside the home, chivalric and attentive to his wife inside. Like too

many husbands, the one in this story has been inclined to undervalue his wife during their prosperity, as “the mere dependent and ornament of his happier hours.” He should know better. Irving agrees with both his Victorian readers and with the modern Feminist about male condescension and he teaches the husband a lesson, the moral of the story: “No man knows what the wife of his bosom is--no man knows what a ministering angel she is--until he has gone with her through the fiery trials of this world.” [italics added]

Victorian women collectively increased their status and political influence by promoting marriage, which secured, protected and empowered them. Their provinces became the home, the schools and the churches. They dictated morals, manners and ministers. They created and largely controlled American popular culture while men were busy with competitive business. Wives provided “a little world of love at home...Whereas a single man is apt to run to waste and self-neglect, to fancy himself lonely and abandoned, and his heart to fall to ruin like some deserted mansion for want of an inhabitant.” The home is the metaphor of the heart, also embodied in the wife. The husband is the head in complementary relation to his wife, deferring to her within her sphere of responsibility. This husband, Leslie, is a “romantic” in a chivalric popular culture and carries his responsibility to protect his wife to an unrealistic extreme: “’Her life,’ said he, ‘shall be like a fairy tale’.”

But then he loses all his money. The narrator, or Irving, advises him to be realistic: “But how are you to keep it from her?” Persuaded, Leslie breaks the news to his wife.

“And how did she bear it?”“Like an angel!” ...

“You call yourself poor, my friend; you were never so rich--you never knew the boundless treasures of excellence you possess in that woman.”

The couple move out of the city into a small cottage “humble enough in its appearance for the most pastoral poet, and yet it had a pleasing rural look. A wild vine had overrun one end with a profusion of foliage; a few trees threw their branches gracefully over it...flowers...a wicket gate.” This lovely cottage in the country is the American Dream, for most people. Most readers would love to live in a place like that. Yet Leslie feels ashamed that his wife has been “reduced to this paltry situation--to be caged in a miserable cottage --to be obliged to toil almost in the menial concerns of her wretched habitation.” Ironically, he sounds like a modern Feminist complaining about housewives being caged at home.

Irving sets up a polarity between the City as the place of prosperity and the country or Garden as the place of material “poverty” and spiritual wealth. The values of the heart embodied in the wife and imaged in the pastoral cottage are implicitly divine. That is the lesson the husband learns, that he should give the highest priority to his wife and the spiritual and domestic values she represents. Yet as soon as possible, by implication the couple moves right back to the City, giving a higher value to status and money than to all that is glorified in the wife: “The world has since gone prosperously with him.” [italics added] Catering to his audience Irving gives no evidence that he realizes the contradiction. Victorians wanted virtue to be rewarded. The story ends in the old Puritan tradition of belief that God rewards the virtuous elect with prosperity. Later in the century, in The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885), Howells depicts Silas the successful businessman heeding his Victorian wife as a conscience and retreating from corruption in the City to his family farm. Today the Postmodernists who dominate American culture are atheist urbanites who scorn rural values, especially traditional marriage and religion.

Art in a culture unified by a common ideology and consensus about values tends to be iconic, like, Medieval and Victorian art. Icons are images with fixed meanings commonly understood, as in religions. Irving and Hawthorne in particular use cultural icons and conventional motifs: in this story the virginal Victorian wife is an angel, she plays a harp, her name is Mary, she makes their home a heaven on earth, she

wears a white dress with flowers in her hair and she serves him strawberries and cream. The story is a conventional allegory of iconic signs: The husband (head) learns the true value of his wife (heart), their union is strengthened and they are both rewarded for their virtue.

THE COP AND THE ANTHEM:

"The Cop and the Anthem" covers one night and one morning in the life of Soapy, a homeless man living in New York City in the early 1900s. When it's warm, Soapy lives in Madison Square Park. Now that winter is coming, the park will be too cold. So, Soapy decides to do what he's done for several winters: get himself arrested so he can spend the winter in jail.

Soapy decides to fill his belly and get arrested at the same time by eating in a fancy restaurant and then not being able to pay for the meal. But the waiter figures out what he's up to just by looking at his clothes—Soapy doesn't make it through the door. Next, Soapy breaks a shop window. Since he doesn't run away, the policeman doesn't believe Soapy is responsible. After that, Soapy finds a cheaper restaurant to try his initial plan on. He gets in and eats a yummy meal. When Soapy reveals he can't pay for the meal, the waiters refuse to call the cops, and toss Soapy out on his ear instead.

From there, Soapy pretends to hit up on a lady, right in front of a cop. Well, the lady is game and says she'll go home with Soapy if he buys her some beers. Soapy runs away from her and tries to get arrested by yelling and dancing like a maniac on the street in front of a policeman. This policeman thinks Soapy is a drunk college guy, and he leaves Soapy alone. Finally, Soapy steals a man's umbrella, claiming it's his. The man confesses that he actually found the umbrella and that it could well be Soapy's. So, he doesn't call over the policeman watching them.

Soapy gives up trying to get arrested for the night, and heads back to his park bench. On the way, he comes to a quiet street with a church on it. He hears a beautiful anthem (religious hymn, in this case) being played on an organ coming from the church. Soapy knows the anthem and it reminds him of past days when he had family and friends and church.

The anthem creates a huge change in Soapy's "soul" (42). He realizes that he can have a better life than this. Inspired and feeling empowered, Soapy begins making plans for the future. First thing he needs? A job. Lucky for him, he even knows where he can probably get one. Tomorrow, he'll go and get that job and work toward the dreams and goals he used to have.

Soapy's thoughts are interrupted by the long arm of the law.

That long arm is attached to the sixth policeman we see in the story. He arrests Soapy for loitering, or vagrancy (not having a place to live or a way to support yourself). The next morning, a judge sentences Soapy to three months in jail.

The Cop and the Anthem Theme of Freedom and Confinement

O. Henry turns this theme upside-down and shakes it in this story. "The Cop and the Anthem" is about a free man, Soapy, *trying* to get thrown in jail. Over the course of the story, Soapy begins to discover that he is a prisoner of his own mind and that he can choose a better life. By better, we mean a life where he has more freedom and control. When Soapy has a change of heart, he sees work as a way to achieve this freedom and control. Sure, he'll have to answer to a boss, but it will be worth it to have more freedom and feel good about himself.

TO ANY WOULD-BE TERRORISTS:

Naomi Shihab Nye's letter to would-be terrorists was a very powerful letter. She was so loud and clear throughout her argument. This letter was sad, but very true! I think anyone can relate to her letter. Not because we are terrorists, but because we have all witnessed stories about them and the harm they do to innocent people. I'm sure we all have the same beliefs and thoughts on terrorists. We want it to stop! No one can understand what goes on through these people's heads, I mean there must be so much hate in order for them to harm others. I can only imagine how hard it was for her to write this letter because of her cultural background. She's Arab-American as she claims in the letter. Having both cultural backgrounds that hate one another is very sad.

Nye is arguing about terrorist and trying to talk someone out of it. Giving them arguments to why terrorists is bad. She uses family, tv, movies, and religion to argue why its wrong and why it shouldn't be tolerated. This letter is for everyone, Americans and Arabs and all those terrorist out there. The tone she uses in her letter is very direct, it's straight-forward. She gives her opinion, provides facts, and sounds understanding. The word choices she uses are questions, agreement, examples, and shows a lot of symbols. She uses questions for many reasons, she wants the reader to understand by answering them and have a moment of thoughts. Her arguments are for us to understand where she's coming from and what she believes. She uses symbols such as, exclamation marks to let us know what shes saying and her opinion. It's as if we are having an conversation with her.

ANALYSIS:

To Any Would-Be Terrorists is a short story written by an arab named, Naomi Shihab Nye. She starts off her story by writing about her country back home in the middle east. It is like she is writing a letter to her country voicing her displeasure. She talks about how disappointed she is in her country with all of the terrorists that there are and how there bringing down the country. She is crying out to americans saying how her country is not like this. She says that her country are great, caring, loving people who are not terrorist type people. She talks about her family and how nice they are. She then goes on to write about four things she wants us to think about. The first one is how people judge her just because shes palestinian. She works so hard to show that she is a normal nice person but people judge her just because shes brown. The second one she talked about was her grandmother and how faithful to god she was and how everyone is different we just need to accept them. The third was how americans are killing innocent people over there and how they need to stop doing that. The last one was basically talking about there countries pride and how nice they are.

NOT WAVING BUT DROWNING:

A dead man complains that he was further out than anyone thought and not waving at them, but instead drowning. Well that's tough luck, because nobody hears him.

Other people remark that it's too bad he's dead, especially since he was a bit of a goodtime guy. They think of reasons that he might have died, including the coldness of the water and heart failure.

But the dead guy ain't havin' that. He tells them (not that they're listening or anything) that he was struggling all his life—not just at the moment of his death.

ANALYSIS:

A critical reading of a classic poem

'Not Waving but Drowning' is the best-known poem by Stevie Smith (1902-71). In 1995, it was voted Britain's fourth favourite poem in a poll. First published in 1957, 'Not Waving but Drowning' fuses the comic and the tragic, moving between childlike simplicity and darker, more cynical touches. You can read the poem here, but in this post we want to analyse Stevie Smith's language in this poem, in an effort to get to grips with its meaning.

'Not Waving but Drowning' is divided into three stanzas, all of which are quatrains rhymed *abcb* (though the rhyme in the first and third stanzas, on *moaning/drowning*, is imperfect). A brief summary of the poem reveals that although it seems simple in meaning, it is anything but. The first stanza tells us that nobody heard the drowning man (his dying moans being retrospectively recounted: he is now 'the dead man'), yet he continued to cry for help and wave his arms, his flailing mistaken for friendly waving. The first two lines are spoken by some impersonal narrator; the last two lines by the dead man himself. This is a voice from the dead: 'I *was* much further out', not 'I am'. He is already a goner.

The second stanza is spoken by the impersonal narrator again – or is it? It's hard to tell. The dead man's words were not enclosed in helpful quotation marks in the first stanza, so there are no clear markers to tell us who is speaking. The voice in this second stanza ('Poor chap…') may be the narrator who began the poem, or it may be the voice of the crowd who witnessed the man's death but failed to realise he was in trouble. The syntax cleverly suggests the simple and the childlike: 'It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way'. Note the missing punctuation between 'him' and 'his': no colon or comma divides the first clause from the second. 'They said', reads the fourth line of this second stanza in its entirety. But when did 'they' take over? From the third line in this stanza? Or the first? Like the man's death itself, the poem's voices are awash with confusion.

The third and final stanza then gives a voice to the dead man again, who 'still … lay moaning': lying not in the sea now, but in his grave; not dying, but dead. When 'the dead man' moaned in the first stanza, the wording struck us as odd: he was clearly still alive (though done for) when he 'lay moaning' at the start of the poem, but the juxtaposition of 'the dead man' and the fact that he was 'moaning' made us do a double take: oh, he's dead *now*, and he was moaning *then*. But in this final stanza, he is moaning from beyond the grave: he really is a 'dead man … moaning'. The reworking of 'I was much further out' into 'I was much too far out all my life' tells us that this is a ghostly voice addressing us, and also broadens out the physical drowning into something more symbolic: cries for help are often mistaken for laughs of good humour ; 'hysteria', as T. S. Eliot said, might 'easily be misunderstood'.

'Not Waving but Drowning', like many of Stevie Smith's poems, sounds light and comical, sing song like and sprightly, yet hides a darker meaning. Any analysis of 'Not Waving but Drowning' must acknowledge this, but must also take into account the curious anomalies in punctuation and wording which create this unnerving effect.