about the anecdote(s), which could also include discussion of the anecdotes considered in Pratt's essay (pp. 2–11).

4. In writing these questions, we have been putting the word "literary" in quotation marks to indicate that the category of "literature" is not something fixed and given but is itself a matter of discussion and debate. We have suggested that *literary* may mean nothing more than "what is written" as opposed to what is told orally, or it can mean something that is inventive, surprising. "Literature" can also refer to texts that seem to refer more widely to common experiences than others. An anecdote is always a singular story, a tale of some one thing that happened to some one person (or possibly to a group of people). A literary anecdote might be seen as a story about one person who becomes the representative of others, as the scared girl and tough mother in anecdote (4) might represent the childish fears and maternal toughness of other children and mothers. Consider each of these anecdotes from this point of view. That is, to what extent can the anecdotes the authors tell be seen as representative of more common or general experiences?

THE SHORT STORY

As a form, the short story derives from the tale, as in the folktales passed down from one storyteller to another. As a literary form, the short story was fully developed in the nineteenth century by such writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe in the United States and Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant in France. But where Hawthorne and Poe frequently based their stories on folktales or, in Poe's case, on mythic or gothic material, Flaubert and de Maupassant were concerned with matters of everyday life, and transformed their close observations of people and events into fiction. Like the anecdote, the short story tells a story of what happened; but where we assume that the anecdote is telling us of something that really happened to the narrator, we assume that the short story is fictional. Sometimes, however, the distinction is not so obvious. If we look at William Carlos Williams's "The Use of Force," which is written as a first-person narrative, it is easy at first to assume that we are reading a description of a real event. Indeed, the story is based on a real incident from Williams's medical practice, but his giving his story a title is the first sign of his fictionalizing of the event. We want to know what it means. For where the anecdote is likely to spell out the meaning of events, the short story is more likely to require the reader to interpret the meaning of the story. As you read each of the following three stories, consider what makes each of them fictional. Labov's six elements can be useful here. Which ones are missing? Which contribute most to the effect of the story?

The Kiss

Kate Chopin

This selection is a short story by the American writer Kate Chopin, who lived in Louisiana a century ago. She was unique for her time, in that she wrote frequently about a powerful female sexuality trapped within an elaborate code of manners.

It was still quite light out of doors, but inside with the curtains drawn and the smouldering fire sending out a dim, uncertain glow, the room was full of deep shadows. 1

Brantain sat in one of these shadows; it had overtaken him and he did not mind. The obscurity lent him courage to keep his eyes fastened as ardently as he liked upon the girl who sat in the firelight. 2

She was very handsome, with a certain fine, rich coloring that belongs to the healthy brune type. She was quite composed, as she idly stroked the satiny coat of the cat that lay curled in her lap, and she occasionally sent a slow glance into the shadow where her companion sat. They were talking low, of indifferent things which plainly were not the things that occupied their thoughts. She knew that he loved her—a frank, blustering fellow without guile enough to conceal his feelings, and no desire to do so. For two weeks past he had sought her society eagerly and persistently. She was confidently waiting for him to declare himself and she meant to accept him. The rather insignificant and unattractive Brantain was enormously rich; and she liked and required the entourage which wealth could give her. 3

During one of the pauses between their talk of the last tea and the next reception the door opened and a young man entered whom Brantain knew quite well. The girl turned her face toward him. A stride or two brought him to her side, and bending over her chair—before she could suspect his intention, for she did not realize that he had not seen her visitor—he pressed an ardent, lingering kiss upon her lips. 4

Brantain slowly arose; so did the girl arise, but quickly, and the newcomer stood between them, a little amusement and some defiance struggling with the confusion in his face. 5

"I believe," stammered Brantain, "I see that I have stayed too long. I—I had no idea—that is, I must wish you good-by." He was clutching his hat with both hands, and probably did not perceive that she was extending her hand to him, her presence of mind had not completely deserted her; but she could not have trusted herself to speak. 6

"Hang me if I saw him sitting there, Nattie! I know it's deuced awkward for you. But I hope you'll forgive me this once—this very first break. Why, what's the matter?" 7

"Don't touch me; don't come near me," she returned angrily. "What do you mean by entering the house without ringing?" 8

"I came in with your brother, as I often do," he answered coldly, in self- 9
justification. "We came in the side way. He went upstairs and I came in here hoping to find you. The explanation is simple enough and ought to satisfy you that the misadventure was unavoidable. But do say that you forgive me, Nathalie," he entreated, softening.

"Forgive you! You don't know what you are talking about. Let me pass. 10
It depends upon—a good deal whether I ever forgive you."

At that next reception which she and Brantain had been talking about 11
she approached the young man with a delicious frankness of manner when she saw him there.

"Will you let me speak to you a moment or two, Mr. Brantain?" she 12
asked with an engaging but perturbed smile. He seemed extremely unhappy; but when she took his arm and walked away with him, seeking a retired corner, a ray of hope mingled with the almost comical misery of his expression. She was apparently very outspoken.

"Perhaps I should not have sought this interview, Mr. Brantain; but— 13
but, oh, I have been very uncomfortable, almost miserable since that little encounter the other afternoon. When I thought how you might have misinterpreted it, and believed things"—hope was plainly gaining the ascendancy over misery in Brantain's round, guileless face—"of course, I know it is nothing to you, but for my own sake I do want you to understand that Mr. Harvy is an intimate friend of long standing. Why, we have always been like cousins —like brother and sister, I may say. He is my brother's most intimate associate and often fancies that he is entitled to the same privileges as the family. Oh, I know it is absurd, uncalled for, to tell you this; undignified even," she was almost weeping, "but it makes so much difference to me what you think of—of me." Her voice had grown very low and agitated. The misery had all disappeared from Brantain's face.

"Then you do really care what I think, Miss Nathalie? May I call you 14
Miss Nathalie?" They turned into a long, dim corridor that was lined on either side with tall, graceful plants. They walked slowly to the very end of it. When they turned to retrace their steps Brantain's face was radiant and hers was triumphant.

Harvy was among the guests at the wedding; and he sought her out in a 15
rare moment when she stood alone.

"Your husband," he said, smiling, "has sent me over to kiss you." 16

"Your husband," he said, smiling, "has sent me over to kiss you." 17

A quick blush suffused her face and round polished throat. "I suppose it's natural for a man to feel and act generously on an occasion of this kind. He tells me he doesn't want his marriage to interrupt wholly that pleasant intimacy which has existed between you and me. I don't know what you've been telling him," with an insolent smile, "but he has sent me here to kiss you."

She felt like a chess player who, by the clever handling of his pieces, sees 18
the game taking the course intended. Her eyes were bright and tender with a smile as they glanced up into his; and her lips looked hungry for the kiss which they invited.

"But, you know," he went on quietly, "I didn't tell him so, it would have 19
been ungrateful, but I can tell you. I've stopped kissing women; it's dangerous."

Well, she had Brantain and his million left. A person can't have every- 20
thing in this world; and it was a little unreasonable of her to expect it.

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: COMPARING "NATURAL" AND "LITERARY" NARRATIVES

1. This is a sophisticated story of a sophisticated world. Begin your study of it by comparing its structure to that of "natural" narratives. Does it have all six of Labov's analytic elements? Discuss what is omitted, compressed, or rearranged in this story.
2. Retell the story as a personal narrative recounted by Mr. Harvy. Imagine him in his club, telling this tale to a small circle of intimate friends. You will have to develop his character and motivation a bit to do this, but try to keep your additions in harmony with the material in Chopin's version of this story. Aim for a "complete" narrative, with all six Labovian elements.
3. In a written essay, take up the question of the relationship between "natural" narratives and "literary" narratives, exploring both their similarities and their differences. Use Pratt and Chopin as your primary sources, but feel free to add material from the anecdotes of Benjamin, Williams, Auster, Jameson, or Staples, or from William Carlos Williams if you have studied this material. Try to reach some conclusion about which is more important: the differences or the similarities between popular and literary storytelling.

The Use of Force

William Carlos Williams

The following selection is a personal experience recounted by the American poet William Carlos Williams. Williams was a physician—a general practitioner—and this is a story drawn from his practice.

They were new patients to me, all I had was the name, Olson. Please come 1
down as soon as you can, my daughter is very sick.

When I arrived I was met by the mother, a big startled looking woman, 2
very clean and apologetic who merely said, Is this the doctor? and let me in. In the back, she added. You must excuse us, doctor, we have her in the kitchen where it is warm. It is very damp here sometimes.

The child was fully dressed and sitting on her father's lap near the 3
kitchen table. He tried to get up, but I motioned for him not to bother, took off my overcoat and started to look things over. I could see that they were all very nervous, eyeing me up and down distrustfully. As often, in such cases, they weren't telling me more than they had to, it was up to me to tell them; that's why they were spending three dollars on me.