



SWINBURNE  
SENIOR SECONDARY COLLEGE

# YEAR 12 LITERATURE HOLIDAY HOMEWORK 2018



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<b>Holiday Homework Required:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read ALL of the Texts</li><li>2. Complete the Holiday Homework Booklet</li></ol>
<b>Recommended Work:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read Biographies on each Author</li><li>2. Watch YouTube Videos of readings of the poems and texts, and of performances of Agamemnon.</li></ol>
<b>Resources Required for Subject:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Texts</li><li>2. Google</li><li>3. YouTube</li><li>4. Pens and Paper</li></ol>
<b>Key Links:</b>	-Past exams and examiners reports <a href="http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au">www.vcaa.vic.edu.au</a>
<b>Additional Resources:</b>	Text Book, VATE Perspectives, Insight on Texts.

**SWINBURNE SENIOR SECONDARY COLLEGE**

# 2018: LITERATURE UNITS 3 & 4

## TEXT LIST 2018

<i>Literature for Senior Students</i>	Robert Beardwood
<i>Agamemnon</i>	Aeschylus
<i>"Baron in the Trees", in Our Ancestors</i>	Italo Calvino
<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	Joseph Conrad
<i>Only the Animals</i>	Ceridwen Dovey*
<i>Ariel</i>	Sylvia Plath*

\* VCAA has set the list of short stories and poems for study. Check the web site for details.

## Unit 3: Form and transformation

In this unit students consider how the form of a text affects meaning, and how writers construct their texts. They investigate ways writers adapt and transform texts and how meaning is affected as texts are adapted and transformed. They consider how the perspectives of those adapting texts may inform or influence the adaptations. Students draw on their study of adaptations and transformations to develop creative responses to texts. Students develop their skills in communicating ideas in both written and oral forms.

**Area of study 1**                      **Adaptations and transformations**

**Text for Study:**                      ***Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad**

In this area of study students focus on how the form of text contributes to the meaning of the text. Students develop an understanding of the typical features of a particular form of text and how the conventions associated with it are used, such as the use of imagery and rhythm in a poem or the use of setting, plot and narrative voice in a novel. Students use this understanding to reflect upon the extent to which changing the form of the text affects its meaning. By exploring adaptations, students also consider how creators of adaptations may emphasise or understate perspectives, assumptions and ideas in their presentation of a text.

**Outcome 1** On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the extent to which meaning changes when a text is adapted to a different form.

**Area of study 2**                      **Creative responses to texts**

**Text for Study:**                      ***Only the Animals* by Ceridwen Dovey**

In this area of study students focus on the imaginative techniques used for creating and recreating a literary work. Students use their knowledge of how the meaning of texts can change as form changes to construct their own creative transformations of texts. They learn how writers develop

images of people and places, and they develop an understanding of language, voice, form and structure. Students draw inferences from the original text and speculate about the writer's purpose. In their adaptation of the tone and the style of the original text, students develop an understanding of the concerns and attitudes explored. Students develop an understanding of the various ways in which authors craft texts. They reflect critically upon their own responses as they relate to the text, and discuss the purpose and context of their creations.

**Outcome 2** On completion of this unit the student should be able to respond creatively to a text and comment on the connections between the text and the response.

## UNIT 4: Interpreting texts

In this unit students develop critical and analytic responses to texts. They consider the context of their responses to texts as well as the ideas explored in the texts, the style of the language and points of view. They investigate literary criticism informing both the reading and writing of texts. Students develop an informed and sustained interpretation supported by close textual analysis. For the purposes of this unit, literary criticism is characterised by extended, informed and substantiated views on texts and may include reviews, peer-reviewed articles and transcripts of speeches. Specifically, for Unit 4 Outcome 1, the literary criticism selected must reflect different perspectives, assumptions and ideas about the views and values of the text/s studied.

**Area of study 1**                      **Literary perspectives**

**Text for Study:**                      ***The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino**

In this area of study students focus on how different readings of texts may reflect the views and values of both writer and reader. Students consider the ways in which various interpretations of texts can contribute to understanding. They compare and analyse two pieces of literary criticism reflecting different perspectives, assumptions and ideas about the views and values of the text studied. Students identify the issues, ideas and contexts writers choose to explore, the way these are represented in the text/s and the cultural, social, historical and ideological contexts in which they were created. Students enquire into the ways readers may arrive at differing interpretations about a text and the grounds on which they are developed. Through close attention to two pieces of literary criticism reflecting different perspectives, students develop their own response to a text.

**Outcome 1** On completion of this unit students should be able to produce an interpretation of a text using different literary perspectives to inform their view.

**Area of Study 2 Close analysis**

**Texts for Study:**    ***Agamemnon* by Aeschylus and *Ariel* by Sylvia Plath**

In this area of study students focus on detailed scrutiny of the language, style, concerns and construction of texts. Students attend closely to textual details to examine the ways specific features and/or passages in a text contributes to their overall interpretations. Students consider features of texts including structure, context, ideas, images, characters and situations, and the language in which these are expressed. They develop their interpretations using detailed reference to the text, logical sequencing of ideas and persuasive language.

**Outcome 2** On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse features of texts and develop and justify interpretations of texts.

## Assessment

The student’s level of achievement for will be determined by school assessed coursework and an end-of-year exam.

School assessed coursework for Unit 3 will contribute 25 percent to the study score.

School assessed coursework for Unit 4 will contribute 25 percent to the study score.

The level of achievement for Units 3 & 4 is also assessed by an end-of-year examination which will contribute 50 percent to the study score.

## Written examination

- Students must not write on the same text twice
- Students must not write on two texts of the same genre

October/November	Written examination	Marks	Times
(on a date to be published annually by the VCAA)	<b>Task A — Literary perspectives</b> Assessment will be based on a written response to a statement related to one selected text from the Literature Text List published annually by the VCAA.	20	Reading time: 15 minutes Writing time: 2 hours

<b>Task B — Close analysis</b> Assessment will be based on a written response to passages from one selected text from the Literature Text List published annually by the VCAA.	20	
<b>Total examination score</b>	<b>40</b>	

## Unit 3: Year 12 Literature - Calendar

WEEK	Class content	Skills	Homework & Assessment Homework due at or before the beginning of class
<b>1</b> Orientation Jan 30 – Feb 2	Orientation – <b>Ceridwen Dovey “Only The Animals”</b>	<b>OUTCOME 2: Respond Creatively to and comment on the connections between the text and the response.</b>	
<b>2</b> Feb 5 – 9	Only The Animals		
<b>3</b> Feb 12 – 16	Only The Animals		
<b>4</b> Feb 19 – 23	Only The Animals		
<b>5</b> Feb 26 – Mar 2			<b>CREATIVE RESPONSE SAC</b>
<b>6</b> Mar 5 – 9			<b>CREATIVE RESPONSE SAC</b> <b>CREATIVE RESPONSE SAC</b>
<b>7</b> Labour day Mar 12 – 16	Soiree Week  Soiree Week		<b>CREATIVE RESPONSE SAC</b> <b>Oral Presentation of Creative Response:</b> 1. <b>Analysis/Links</b> 2. <b>Reflection on Process</b>
<b>8</b> Mar 19 – 23	<b>Joseph Conrad “Heart of Darkness”</b>  Heart of Darkness	<b>OUTCOME 1: Analyse the extent to which meaning changes when a text is adapted to a different form.</b>	
<b>9</b> Good Friday Mar 26 - 29	Heart of Darkness  Heart of Darkness		
<b>HOLIDAY</b>			
<b>10</b> April 16 – 20	Heart of Darkness  Heart of Darkness		
<b>11</b> ANZAC day April 23 – 27	Heart of Darkness		

<b>12</b> April 30 – May 4	Heart of Darkness – Interpretative Essay <b>Heart of Darkness – FILM (1993)</b>	Students will view the Film version of Heart of Darkness in class.	<b>H.O.D – Interpretation Practice SAC</b>
<b>13</b> May 7 – 11	Heart of Darkness – FILM (1993)		
<b>14</b> May 14 – 18	Heart of Darkness – FILM (1993)		
<b>15</b> May 21 – 25	Heart of Darkness – FILM (1993)		<b>H.O.D – Adaptations PRAC SAC</b>
<b>16</b> May 28 – June 1			<b>H.O.D – Adaptations SAC</b>
<b>17</b> June 4 – 8	Exam Preparation Exam Preparation		
<b>GAT week</b> Queen’s birthday June 11 – 15			<b>LITERATURE PRAC EXAM GAT</b>

## Unit 4: Year 12 Literature - Calendar

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>Class content</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Homework &amp; Assessment</b> Homework due at or before the beginning of class
<b>1</b> June 18 – 22	<b>Italo Calvino “The Baron in the Trees”</b> The Baron in the Trees	<b>OUTCOME 1: Produce an interpretation of a text using different literary perspectives to inform their view.</b>	
<b>2</b> June 25 – 29	The Baron in the Trees The Baron in the Trees		<b>BARON Research Task Due</b>
<b>HOLIDAY</b>			
<b>3</b> July 16 – 20	The Baron in the Trees The Baron in the Trees		<b>HOLIDAY HOMEWORK Due</b>
<b>4</b> July 23 – 27	The Baron in the Trees The Baron in the Trees		<b>Baron in the Trees – Literary Perspectives PRAC SAC</b>
<b>5</b> July 30 – Aug 3			<b>BARON IN THE TREES –SAC</b>
<b>6</b> Aug 6 – 10	<b>Aeschylus “Agamemnon”</b> Aeschylus “Agamemnon”	<b>OUTCOME 2: Analyse Features of texts and develop and justify interpretations of texts.</b>	
<b>7</b> Aug 13 – 17	Aeschylus “Agamemnon” Aeschylus “Agamemnon”		<b>AGAMEMNON Close Analysis PRAC SAC</b>
<b>8</b> Aug 20 – 24			<b>AGAMEMNON Close Analysis SAC</b>
<b>9</b> Aug 27 – 31	<b>Sylvia Plath “Ariel”</b> Sylvia Plath “Ariel”		
<b>10</b> Sep 3 – 7	Sylvia Plath “Ariel” Sylvia Plath “Ariel”		
<b>11</b> Sep 10 – 14	Sylvia Plath “Ariel” Sylvia Plath “Ariel”		<b>ARIEL Close Analysis PRAC SAC</b>

<b>12</b> Sep 17 – 21			<b>ARIEL Close Analysis SAC</b>
<b>HOLIDAY</b>			
<b>13</b> Oct 8 – 12	<i>Exam revision</i>		<b>LITERATURE PRAC EXAM</b>
<b>14</b> Oct 15 – 19			
<b>15</b> Oct 22 – 26			<b>Unit 4 work due 22 October Celebration day 23 October</b>
<b>16</b> Oct 29 – Nov 2			<b>Exams 31 Oct – 21 Nov</b>

## ***Only the Animals*** **Ceridwen Dovey**

'The life stories related by these very civilized animals are in some cases touching (the elephant), in others amusing (the mussel), but all are absorbing. They are transmitted to us with a light touch and no trace of sentimentality.' J.M. Coetzee

'A suite of associatively linked stories that dares this imaginative leap. It is a haunted book . . . [with] a subtler play of awareness and self-awareness . . . [and] a bravura flair for pastiche . . . Only the Animals is a form of lyrical anthropology, a partial but generous approach to the changing significances of animals in our literary Imaginations . . . This is a book of consistently good stories deftly told, full of drama and emotion . . . [with] an attractive unity of purpose that suggests more than the sum of its parts, a greater consciousness, perhaps, hovering somewhere between heartbreak and hopefulness, wisdom and wonderment.' Canberra Times

'A strange and beautiful work . . . Each story is self-contained, but each is far richer – in terms of emotional and philosophical resonance – for its proximity to the others. To put it another way: Only the Animals is a perfectly integrated work of art brilliantly disguised as a collection of short stories.' Richard King,

“Perhaps only the animals can tell us what it is to be human.”

This quote from Boria Sax, is the first line of the blurb on the back cover of the text and gets to the heart of what this incredible, dense, confronting book is all about. Dovey has created a series of stories that are simultaneously intertwined and independent using animals as her mouthpiece. Set in the midst of ten different human conflicts, each animal references a key literary figure and offers some insight into the nature of human interaction; in all its horror and glory. This text is not about the animals that tell us the story, it is not even really about the beautiful mesmerising stories they tell, it is about the humans who are the owners, manipulators, artists, captors, lovers and tormentors. This insight that “perhaps only the animals can tell us what it is to be human” turns the notion of anthropomorphism on its head. These tales are not intended to reveal an understanding of the animals who speak to us, these tales reflect an image of humanity back at ourselves that is confronting. Dovey challenges traditional associations with certain animals, by endowing them with such original and endearing characteristics, that even the narrators that readers feel desperately sorry for, still evoke surprise at the human version they are enlightening us to.

This text can be accessed by students at a range of levels. On the simplest level, these are rich, engaging tales of love and loss in times of conflict. They are stand-alone stories of animals and their interaction with the species that is supposed to be the highest of them all. Layered within the narrative are references to the historical conflict and figures that the date and place listed at the beginning of each chapter allude to. These are different versions of stories we know; they are based on real people in real places during horrifyingly real conflicts. Told by the souls of animals who have died at the hands of humans, their presence has more substance as it is their version of events we are privy too. Underneath all of this, is the third component that adds more complexity, and delicacy to these stories, the reference to a great literary figure. The references are mostly obvious and clever; it is the intention or comment on humanity that resides in an understanding of the life and work of these people that may pose more of a challenge to younger readers.

## **Read *The Bones: Soul of Camel. Died 1892, Australia* from the collection *only the Animals (the first story)***

Having been shipped over from Tenerife, Camel is now journeying through the outback of Australia with Mister Mitchell. It is Christmas night in 1892 and he is listening to the ramblings of “the poet drifter we’d picked up in Hungerford, Henry Lawson” (p3). Full of rum and not much else, Lawson explains the significance of the bag of bones being carried across the country; the ‘queen’s bones’. With a goanna hovering in the shadows, Camel listens intently to his recollections, the story of the fire at Hospital Creek, his travels and tales. Fearing that the goanna is a ghost threatening to take the precious bag of bones, Mitchell shoots the goanna and the camel is knocked to the ground where he takes his last breath.

1. What do you know about Henry Lawson? How does the description of him fit historical accounts?
2. How were the camels used in this time and place in history?
3. Who are the ghosts that torment Camel? Which of the seven deadly sins cause him to kill the bull?
4. What does the piano symbolise?
5. Do you think Mitchell is successful in ridding himself of the ghost who haunts him?
6. Find all of the descriptions for both the goanna and the camel. What features does each represent?
7. What is the significance of the line; “I had only arrived a few years ago, how could I have done anything wrong?” (p11). Given the setting of this story, what might the author be commenting on?
8. What do the references to Hospital Creek allude to? Is this a true story?
9. Why does she choose a camel for this one? What role does the goanna play?





## **Creative Response to The Bones: Soul of Camel. Died 1892, Australia**

Choose one of the following Prompts and write a short story that draws on the ideas and writing techniques used by Dovey in the short story The Bones: Soul of Camel. Died 1892, Australia.

1. *“Ignore the animals. They’re our only and most loyal spectators.” Explore this idea in a short story.*

**OR**

2. *“The Bush Undertaker”. Use this as a title for a short story.*

***Heart of Darkness***  
**By Joseph Conrad**

Complete a summary of **Heart of Darkness** as you read the novella. Outline the key moments of action, character development and settings used by Conrad. Try to include key quotes that you find interesting or significant in the book's construction.

As you make notes in the summary table, you should also mark each page so you can return to when we study the text next year.

<b>Heart of Darkness - CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>ACTION, SETTINGS, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, IMAGERY...</b>	<b>KEY QUOTES:</b> <i>"A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth."</i>
<b>Heart of Darkness - CHAPTER 2</b>	

<i>ACTION, SETTINGS, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, IMAGERY...</i>	<i>KEY QUOTES:</i>
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<b>Heart of Darkness - CHAPTER 3</b>	
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<i>ACTION, SETTINGS, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, IMAGERY...</i>	<i>KEY QUOTES:</i>
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***Heart of Darkness***

### ...and its adaptation

Look at the film stills provided. After you have read *Heart of Darkness* and have developed an understanding of the characters through Conrad's descriptions, write a short analytical paragraph that discusses the similarities and differences between Conrad's characters and the some of the images portrayed in the stills.

1. Do the stills match your image of Marlow and Kurtz as described in the novella?
2. What qualities seem to be retained?
3. How are they different?



*Marlow is a thirty-two-year-old sailor who has always lived at sea...*



*Kurtz is an ivory trader in Africa and commander of a trading post, he monopolises his position as a demigod...*

**WRITE YOUR COMPARISON HERE:**

***The Baron in the Trees***

# Italo Calvino

***After reading the novel, take some time to write your interpretation of the text's meaning through a 500 word review.***

## **You review should include:**

1. A summary of the novel's storyline, plot and action.
2. Discussion of the key characters.
3. Discussion of the novel's setting and context.
4. Calvino's concerns regarding society's constraints and the power of pursuing individual ideals.
5. Calvino's writing style, symbols and descriptions.
6. What did you learn from the novel? Does it leave you with any questions?

# Book Review: The Baron in the Trees

Words by

**Sally Wilson**

| February 15, 2016

“My father was an agronomist; my mother, a botanist,” Italian author Italo Calvino told his translator William Weaver, in an interview conducted for *The Paris Review* in 1983. “They were profoundly concerned with the vegetable world, with nature, the natural sciences. But they became aware very early that I had no



**inclination in that direction—the usual reaction of children towards their parents.”**  
**The family pedigree must have seeped in nevertheless, because one of Calvino’s earliest books, *The Baron in the Trees*, is precisely what you’d expect the novelist son of a pair of botanists to pen.**

Italo Calvino was born in Havana, Cuba in 1923, but spent his youth in and around San Remo, Italy, where the Calvino family divided its time between an experimental flower farm in the city and a country house in the hills, sprawling with tropical cultivars like grapefruit and avocados. The author once admitted to experiencing boredom through his childhood, the kind “full of dreams, a sort of projection into another place, into another reality.” So it’s easy to imagine him, legs languid, seated in one of his father’s trees reading Robert Louis Stevenson or Franz Kafka like a living precursor to Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò, the hero of *The Baron in the Trees* (*Il barone rampante*).

*The Baron in the Trees* was first published in 1957, when Calvino was 34 years old. It’s a book I’ve read once or twice, and without doubt will read again. My copy carries pen marks, heavy underlining, and even the odd exclamation point; on each return visit, when I pick it up, I find more to underline, more to suck in deeply and dwell on. I think that’s the beauty of *anything* by Italo Calvino: his writing operates on both an emotional and technical level and implants itself deeply in the memory.

I still remember the first time I read of Cosimo, aged 12, the eldest son of Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò and the Baroness Corradina di Rondò (nicknamed the ‘Generalessa’), who stood up from the family dining table at lunchtime on 15 June 1767, refusing his plate of snails, and climbed into a holm oak tree never to set foot on the surface of the earth again. Cosimo’s story is told by his younger brother, Biagio, who admits: “Cosimo’s life was so uncommon, mine so ordinary and modest, and yet our childhood was spent together, both of us indifferent to the manias of adults, both trying to find paths unbeaten by others.”

At its core *The Baron in the Trees* is a critical, creative story about individual identity and independence. On the verge of becoming a teenager, Cosimo refuses tradition and steps instead into a cosmic space on earth, which he discovers amongst the treetops. The vision which confronts him once he climbs into the tree is vast, enduring:

*Cosimo was in the holm oak. The branches spread out – high bridges over the earth, a slight breeze blew; the sun shone. It shone through the leaves so that we had to shade our eyes with our hands to see Cosimo. From the tree Cosimo looked at the world; everything seen from up there was different...*”

At that height the heir to the realm witnesses a complex system of trees, innately capable of providing him shelter and passage and in the branches of his new, arboreal kingdom he steps from oak to elm, from carob to mulberry, before entering his neighbour’s garden, Ondariva, atop a magnolia tree. There he meets Viola, his romantic mirror, and his fate is sealed. If Cosimo entered the trees to firmly strike his independence, he remained in the trees as an expression of his steady vision of love.

“In the Ondariva garden the branches spread out like the tentacles of extraordinary animals, and the plants on the ground opened up stars of fretted leaves like the green skins of reptiles, and waved feathery yellow bamboos with a rustle like paper. From the highest tree Cosimo, in his yearning to enjoy to the utmost the

unusual greens of this exotic flora and its different lights and different silence, would let his head drop upside down, so that the garden became a forest, a forest not of this earth but a new world in itself.”

Calvino’s descriptions of trees are some of the most beguiling in the book. He describes how “olives, because of their tortuous shapes, were comfortable and easy passages for Cosimo, patient trees with rough, friendly bark on which he could pass or pause, in spite of the scarcity of thick branches and the monotony of movement which resulted from their shapes.” On the fig tree, by contrast, Cosimo “could move about forever; [he] would stand under the pavilion of leaves, watching the sun appear through the network of twigs and branches, the gradual swell of the green fruit, smelling the scent of flowers budding in the stalks. The fig tree seemed to absorb him, permeate him with its gummy texture and the buzz of hornets; after a little Cosimo would begin to feel he was becoming a fig himself, and move away, uneasy.” This writing can only come from an experienced tree-climber; someone with nature deeply engrained within.

Cosimo lives a lifetime in the trees – and Calvino goes about proving just how normal that lifetime can be. Up there, Cosimo continues his education; corresponds with philosophers; is acknowledged by Voltaire and Napoleon; sleeps, washes, and hunts. He falls in love and romances many women; becomes master to a dachshund; provides earthly services like pruning and fruit picking; befriends a criminal, and provides him with a constant flow of reading materials; fights pirates and invading armies; attends his father’s funeral and ultimately takes on the title of ‘Baron’, all the while walking the treetops with a “cat’s tread”.

*It’s in the trees that Cosimo finds his truest, personal expression. “Only by being so frankly himself as he was ... could he give something to all men,” says his younger brother Biagio.*

“Sometimes seeing my brother lose himself in the endless spread of an old tree, like some palace of many floors and innumerable rooms, I found a longing coming over me to imitate him and go and live up there too; such is the strength and certainty that this tree had in being a tree.” But Biagio quickly admits that there can only ever be one rebel in a family. Perhaps Calvino is that rebel too; an author living amongst a family of scientists!

Albert Camus and Italo Calvino are often alphabetical neighbours on the literature shelves of bookshops. In Camus’ book, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* he comments: “If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world.” The Baron reaches this point of unity living among the trees: “... he who spent his nights listening to the sap running through its cells; the circles marking the years inside the trunks; the patches of mould growing ever larger helped by the north wind; the birds sleeping and quivering in their nests, then resettling their heads in the softest down of their wings; and the caterpillar waking, and the chrysalis opening.” But this is where Camus and Calvino’s philosophies diverge, because Calvino’s hero always maintains a close proximity to humanity. “No matter how many new qualities he acquired from his closeness with plants and his struggles with animals, his place – it always seemed to me – was clearly with us,” says Biagio.

*This he understood: that association renders men stronger and brings out each person’s best gifts, and gives joy which is rarely to be had by keeping to oneself, the joy of realising how many honest decent capable people there are for whom it is worth giving one’s best.”*

It is not a plot killer to tell you that Cosimo dies without ever touching the earth, instead carried off on the anchor rope of a hot air balloon that disappears on the horizon. “Youth soon passes on earth, so imagine it

on the trees, where it is the fate of everything to fall: leaves, fruit.” This is Calvino at his fantastical best; providing a reflection on humanity that defies his own youthful age at the time he put pen to paper. Calvino the author once described his father as an agronomist and anarchist; his mother as botanist and pacifist. He, himself, was a baron amongst the trees.

**COMPARE your review of *The Baron in the Trees* with Sally Wilson’s interpretation of the text.**

- 1. Choose two points from Wilson’s review that you agree with and explain why using evidence from the novel.**
- 2. Choose one point that you disagree with and explain why using evidence from the novel.**

**Ariel**

BY SYLVIA PLATH

Stasis in darkness.  
Then the substanceless blue  
Pour of tor and distances.

God's lioness,  
How one we grow,  
Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to  
The brown arc  
Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye  
Berries cast dark  
Hooks—

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows.  
Something else

Hauls me through air—  
Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.

White  
Godiva, I unpeel—  
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now I  
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.  
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.  
And I  
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies  
Suicidal, at one with the drive  
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

**Analysing Poetry:  
Sylvia Plath Ariel**

<b>Key aspects/questions</b>	<b>Statement and Description</b>	<b>Key Images/phrases/words</b>
<b>What is the poem about?</b>		
<b>What is the significance of the title?</b>		
<b>What are the key issues/ideas/concerns of the poem? What is Plath's view of these?</b>		
<b>What is the setting of the poem? How is it significant?</b>		

<b>Does the poem have a particular structure and/or rhyming scheme? If so what does it contribute to the meaning of the poem?</b>		
<b>How would you describe the language of the poem? What do the images and sounds contribute to the poem?</b>		
<b>What does the poem reveal about the narrator/author/audience?</b>		

**Write at least a paragraph, beginning with a thesis statement, analysing the poem's language, suggesting what Plath's views are.**

**In "Ariel", title poem of the collection, Plath explores**

**Read the two perspectives on the poem 'Ariel'. To what extent does each interpretation modify or confirm your own reading?**

## MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

On "Ariel"

Jon Rosenblatt

. . . A poem like "Ariel" possesses power and importance to the degree to which the horseback ride Plath once took becomes something more—a ride into the eye of the sun, a journey to death, a stripping of personality and selfhood. To treat "Ariel" as a confessional poem is to suggest that its actual importance lies in the horse-ride taken by its author, in the author's psychological problems, or in its position within the biographical development of the author. None of these issues is as significant as the imagistic and thematic developments rendered by the poem itself. . . .

. . . "Ariel" is probably Plath's finest single construction because of the precision and depth of its images. In its account of the ritual journey toward the center of life and death, Plath perfects her method of leaping from image to image in order to represent mental process. The sensuousness and concreteness of the poem—the "Black sweet blood mouthfuls" of the berries; the "glitter of seas"—is unmatched in contemporary American poetry. We see, hear, touch, and taste the process of disintegration: the horse emerging from the darkness of the morning, the sun beginning to rise as Ariel rushes uncontrollably across the countryside, the rider trying to catch the brown neck but instead "tasting" the blackberries on the side of the road. Then all the rider's perceptions are thrown together: the horse's body and the rider's merge. She hears her own cry as if it were that of a child and flies toward the burning sun that has now risen.

In "Ariel," Plath finds a perfect blend between Latinate and colloquial dictions, between abstractness and concreteness. The languages of her earlier and her later work come together:

White  
Godiva, I unpeel—  
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

The concreteness of the Anglo-Saxon "hands" gives way to the abstractness of the Latinate "stringencies": both the physical and psychological aspects of the self have died and are pared away. Finally, the treatment of aural effects in the poem makes it the finest of Plath's technical accomplishments. The slant-rhymes, the assonance (for example, the "I"-sound in the last three stanzas), and the flexible three-line stanzas provide a superb music. . . . the vortex of images sucks the reader into identifying with a clearly self-destructing journey. On a literal level, few readers would willingly accept this ride into nothingness. But, through its precise rendering of sensation, the poem becomes a temptation: it draws us into its beautiful aural and visual universe against our will. As the pace of the horseride quickens, the intensity of the visual effects becomes greater. The identification of the speaker with the world outside becomes more extreme; Plath's metaphors suggest a large degree of fusion between disparate objects, as in the lines "I / foam to wheat, a glitter of seas." The ride across the fields suddenly turns into an ocean voyage. The body then fuses with the external world. As the speaker's merger with the sun is completed, so is the reader's merger with her: the process of identification within the poem generates a corresponding identification on the part of the reader. If the speaker will be destroyed in the cauldron of energy, the sun, so the reader will be destroyed in the cauldron of the poem. The poem entices us into a kind of death—the experience of abandoning our bodies and selves.

from *Sylvia Plath: The Poetry of Initiation*. Copyright © 1979 by University of North Carolina Press.

#### Margaret Dickie

A poem that moves from "Stasis in darkness," "substanceless," to the "cauldron of morning" cannot be adequately described as an expression of suicidal impulses, although Plath's use of that word demands explanation. The arrow and the dew, although in apparent apposition, do not reinforce each other. The arrow kills, the dew is killed; the arrow at one with the red eye is its apotheosis, while the dew is consumed by the sun. The dew, like the child's cry melting and the unpeeling dead hands and even the foaming wheat and "glitter of seas," symbolizes all that will be overcome or sacrificed in this arrow's drive into morning. But the speaker, identifying with the arrow, presents herself as no sacrificial victim on the altar of any god. The arrow, like the horse, "God's lioness," absorbs the power of the avenging God: "at one with the drive/ Into the red/ Eye," it is associated with the fury that lit the holocaust.

The sexual implications of this imagery reinforce this reading and develop as well its use in "Purdah." The female speaker here identifies with the horse, a symbol of masculine sexual potency which, as the arrow, becomes a phallic image that drives into the eye, the circle associated with female sexuality. Far from a desire to transcend the physical, "Ariel" expresses the exultation of a sex act in which the speaker is both the driving arrow and the receiving cauldron. "God's lioness" in "Ariel" calls upon both strands of the female mythological lioness: as an arrow she is associated with battle, and in her merger with the sun she absorbs its fertility. Destroyer-creator, masculine-feminine, the spirit with which the speaker identifies in "Ariel" is whole, entire in itself. The fires that burn in honor of and through this spirit are emblematic of its passion and ecstasy.

From *Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*. Copyright © 1979 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

A review on the collection *Ariel* from the *New Yorker*

#### Sylvia Plath's Joy

It is fifty years since Sylvia Plath killed herself, in her flat in London, near Primrose Hill, in a house where William Butler Yeats once lived. She was thirty-one. Her two children, Frieda, age three, and Nicholas, barely one, slept in the next room. Plath jammed some rags and towels under the door, then turned the gas on in the oven and laid her head inside. She was separated from her husband, the poet Ted Hughes, who had betrayed her; raising the children was left almost entirely to her. She wrote several dozen of the most extraordinary poems in the English language within the span of a few months, before the children awoke at dawn.

The care with which she prepared her own death scene, leaving out mugs of milk for the children, is the work of a person whose talent for hospitality never left her, though it took a macabre turn. This care extended to her book. On her writing table, she left a black spring binder that contained a manuscript she had completed some months earlier, "Ariel and Other Poems" (she had scratched out alternate possibilities: "Daddy and Other Poems," "A Birthday Present," and "The Rabbit Catcher") and, beside it, a sheaf of nineteen additional poems that she had written since. Hughes published a book he called "Ariel," derived



from the manuscript, with the newer poems added, in 1965. Robert Lowell, who contributed a forward, is said to have exclaimed, when he opened and read the manuscript, "Something amazing has happened."

The feeling that "Ariel" is a discovery, a revelation, has never really faded. For me, it is the great book of earliest morning—the "substanceless blue" of predawn, as the gathering light reveals a world of sense—data previously obscured. Many poets have prized that hour of the day for its clarity, for the clamor of the dawn chorus, or because of its vestigial associations with prayer. Plath took these essentially languorous, and deeply male, associations and added her own stopwatch urgency. Here is "Ariel," her great title poem, in its entirety:

Stasis in darkness.

Then the substanceless blue  
Pour of tor and distances.

God's lioness,  
How one we grew,  
Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to  
The brown arc  
Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye  
Berries cast dark  
Hooks—

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows.  
Something else

Hauls me through air—  
Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.

White  
Godiva, I unpeel—  
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now  
I Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.  
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.  
And I  
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies  
Suicidal, at one with the drive  
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

There is nothing else like this in English; it is, I think, a perfect poem, perfect in its excesses and stray blasphemies (that "nigger-eye"), which make Plath Plath—that is to say, dangerous, heedless, a menace, and irresistible. The greatest thing in it, though, is a detail whose uncanniness will strike any new parent: "The child's cry / Melts in the wall."

The feeling of being inside the addled sensorium of a new mother—prey to the wild swings of mood, the flare-ups of unforeseen tenderness and rage—is inextricable from Plath's sense of the urgency of passing time, time that, in "Ariel," she runs toward and into, not away from or alongside of, as poets are supposed to do. That "child's cry" was a cry, of course, for her, for Plath. In the most straightforward way, it brought "art" and "life," those bedraggled abstractions, into real conflict. To master it in an image that brilliant is only a temporary solution, and so the poem careens to a close upon the word "suicidal," an odd figurative occurrence of a word whose literal meaning Plath took very seriously.

"Melt" is the genius stroke. She uses it elsewhere, too, to describe the sound of crying. In "Lady Lazarus," one of her best-known poems, Plath calls herself a "Pure gold baby / that melts to a shriek." What makes "melt" so good in "Ariel," though, is its materiality: the child's cry from the adjoining room happens inside the wall, not in Plath's ear or the child's mouth. It is one of many details in "Ariel" that bring Plath's surroundings to life; probably, there is no more vivid rendering in poetry of what it is like to share a small

house or apartment with young children. (Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" is an important antecedent.) The Plaths' house in Devon and their flat in London are brightly present in this poetry: the rose curtains, the kitchen knives, the "soft rugs / The last of Victoriana."

"Nick and the Candlestick" is, for me, Plath's greatest poem. Like "Ariel," you can reduce it to show how much it dwells and thrives in excess. Plath, "a miner" in the blue light of dawn, wakes to check on her son, and finds him in some bonkers position in his crib. I have discovered my own children (one of them named Nicholas, partly after this poem) asleep standing up against their crib walls and even upside down, their small faces smashed against the mattress, snoozing blissfully. Each time I found them this way, I quoted Plath: "O love, how did you get here?" That is, of course, a question not only about position but about origin. "Nick and the Candlestick" redoes the birth of little Nicholas Hughes as the birth of Christ, an event that resets time. The eight lines near its middle strike me as some of the most compassionate remarks ever made about a child:

O love, how did you get here?

O embryo

Remembering, even in sleep,

Your crossed position.

The blood blooms clean

In you, ruby.

The pain

You wake to is not yours.

A time of day, dawn, made sharp by anticipated interruption; a house animated by children, their happiness, their demands, their balloons and playthings; the potential for violence innate in all beauty, as well as the awful beauty of violence; the feeling of elation at filling a house with the clacking of a typewriter, and the fear of the silence when the typing ends: these elements are my personal "Ariel," and I tire of the more rhetorical and showy poems—"Daddy," "The Applicant," "Lady Lazarus"—upon which Plath made her notorious name. "Ariel" ends with a poem, "Words," about the season that T. S. Eliot called "midwinter spring" and Wallace Stevens called "the earliest end of winter": March, when, in New England (a region all three poets share), the sap runs. Plath's keystrokes in the quiet house are like "Axes / After whose stroke the wood rings." Before, echoing away from her, they become like horses' "indefatigable hoof taps"—"riderless," as in a funeral procession. Add to the available accounts of Plath (there are so many) this, please: nobody brought a house to life the way she did. "Ariel," despite the tragedy that attends it, is a book with much joy between its covers.

- *Dan Chiasson has been contributing poems to the magazine since 2000 and reviews since 2007. He teaches at Wellesley College. His poetry collections include ["Where's the Moon, There's the Moon"](#) and, most recently, ["Bicentennial."](#)*

# AGAMEMNON

## From The Oresteia by Aeschylus

The events of *Agamemnon* take place against a backdrop that would have been familiar to an Athenian audience. Agamemnon is returning from his victory at Troy, which has been besieged for ten years by Greek armies attempting to recover Helen, Agamemnon's brother's wife, who was stolen by the treacherous Trojan Prince, Paris. (The events of the Trojan War are recounted in Homer's *Iliad*.) The tragedies of the play occur as a result of the crimes committed by Agamemnon's family. His father, Atreus, boiled the children of his own brother, Thyestes, and served them to him. Clytemnestra's lover, Aegisthus (Thyestes's only surviving son), seeks revenge for that crime. Moreover, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, to gain a favourable wind to Troy, and Clytemnestra murders him to avenge her death. The weight of history and heritage becomes a major theme of the play, and indeed the entire trilogy, for the family it depicts cannot escape the cursed cycle of bloodshed propagated by its past. (Sparknotes)

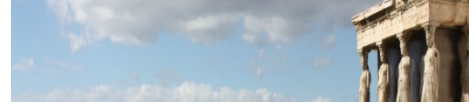


Agamemnon: "The gods made me sacrifice Iphigenia to ensure safe passage for the Greek fleet so that I could retrieve my brother's wife Helen from Troy. I owed a blood debt to my brother Menelaus. I sacked Troy, killed the king and return with Troy's gold and Cassandra as my slave. I long to see my country and my wife".

Clytemnestra: "I ruled Argos for ten years, keeping order while Agamemnon was at war against Troy. I will never forgive him for killing our beloved daughter Iphigenia. I have plotted to kill him in revenge. And now he has brought home that woman Cassandra! I will kill her too".

**Read some more about Helen of Troy and Agamemnon's family history for background to the cycle of revenge and justice.**

**Imagine you are Agamemnon or Clytemnestra. Write a monologue in which you justify your violent, murderous vendetta. Look at the passage provided and try to emulate Aeschylus' language, imagery and style of dialogue.**



**LEADER:**

We'll thank the gods, my lady – first this story,  
let me lose myself in the wonder of it all!  
Tell it start to finish, tell us all.

**CLYTAEMNESTRA:**

The city's ours – in our hands this very day!  
I can hear the cries in crossfire rock the walls.  
Pour oil and wine in the same bowl,  
what have you, friendship? A struggle to the end.  
So with the victors and the victims – outcries,  
you can hear them clashing like their fates.

They are kneeling by the bodies of the dead,  
embracing men and brothers, infants over  
the aged loins that gave them life, and sobbing,  
as the yoke constricts their last free breath,  
for every dear one lost.

And the others,  
there, plunging breakneck through the night –  
the labour of battle sets them down, ravenous,  
to breakfast on the last remains of Troy.  
Not by rank but chance, by the lots they draw,  
they lodge in the houses captured by the spear,  
settling in so soon, released from the open sky,  
the frost and dew. Lucky men, off guard at last,  
they sleep away their first good night in years.

If only they are revering the city's gods,  
the shrines of the gods who love the conquered land,  
no plunderer will be plundered in return.  
Just let no lust, no mad desire seize the armies  
to ravish what they must not touch –  
overwhelmed by all they've won!

The run for home  
and safety waits, the swerve at the post,  
the final lap of the gruelling two-lap race.  
And even if the men come back with no offence  
to the gods, the avenging dead may never rest –  
Oh let no new disaster strike! And here  
you have it, what a woman has to say.  
Let the best win out, clear to see.  
A small desire but all that I could want.

## Argos

