

## Welcome to the *Guide to Style*

**Rationale.** This guide to style is designed to help English majors and minors in writing papers for literature classes in the Department of English at the University of New Mexico. Thus students should familiarize themselves with the principles outlined herein. This guide concentrates on three major areas in the composition of papers on literary topics: structural development, language usage, and format. The information provided here is the minimum expected in most classes in the Department. The format sections are based on the *seventh edition* of the *Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* but are not a replacement for the *MLA*. For more advanced format and/or documentation needs, students are still expected to consult the *MLA* or other recommended style manuals. Additional features include sample poetry explications and a list of research aids. All entries are numbered and indexed in the back for easy reference.

## Developing Papers on Literary Topics

**i. Paper Titles, Descriptive.** Be descriptive, analytical, and creative when choosing a title for a paper. Merely repeating the title of the work or the assignment is tedious. A paper title should contain the gist of the paper's thesis. Always include author and/or title in your paper title. Note that there is no final punctuation in paper titles, except for exclamation and question marks. Titles of papers are not underlined or bolded.

Painting as Metaphor in Eavan Boland's Poetry

"A Pair of Ragged Claws": The Alienated Hero in T. S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

"Something Wicked This Way Comes": Glimpses of Evil in *Macbeth* and *The Duchess of Malfi*

The Rhetoric of Anorexia in Kafka's "The Hunger Artist"

**2. Introductions and Thesis Statements.** Perhaps the most important part of a paper is the introductory paragraph, in which the writer introduces his or her topic and makes a statement that sums up the direction of the argument he or she will pursue. An opening paragraph tries to strike a balance between generalities and specifics that will engage a reader without giving too much information. It is always a good idea to avoid the overly general introduction.

- a) Ever since the beginning of time . . .
- b) Humanity has always sought a spiritual solution to
- c) All women in nineteenth-century England believed
- d) Envy is a powerful emotion that all people have

These opening sentences are too general. Two problems result from such openings: the writer either makes an unacceptably big leap to the specifics of the paper or takes an unacceptably long time getting to the specifics. It is best for the writer to begin with a general statement(s) that is closer to the main point he or she will make. Keep in mind that short papers (3-5 pp.) will require opening paragraphs of only 5-7 sentences, so a long, windy introduction is not necessary. Longer papers may permit more involved introductions; but even in these, it is best to avoid generalities that amount to intellectual throat clearing.

Here are some samples of successful introductory paragraphs. The thesis statements have been underlined.

- e) Individualism was one of the dominant social values in nineteenth-century England. Indeed, in his essay *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill argues that individualism, by allowing people to exploit their full potential, makes a society productive. According to Mill, individualism is defined by choice, and "he who does anything because it is the custom makes no choice" (Mill 1004). Those who do not choose, who let society's customs choose for them, will not raise up themselves or society. We can see the problems of individualism and choice at work in many of the works of the nineteenth century, especially in novels like Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. If we examine Bronte's novel in light of Mill's ideas, we discover that Jane Eyre's struggle as a woman in a male-dominated society is a specific instance of the struggle of an individual in a world dominated by custom.

f) Thomas Hardy and William Butler Yeats contributed to the shaping of modern literature through their treatment of certain themes and issues in poetry. Both writers aimed to infuse a new sense of individual perception into traditional poetic forms, while exploring the new intellectual dimensions of a changing world. In their treatment of women, however, both poets retain a traditional attitude toward social and sexual roles for females. In "For Anne Gregory" and "The Ruined Maid," Yeats and Hardy deal with attitudes toward female desirability from the traditional, male perspective and assert this viewpoint as a reflection of universal social values. Although both poets to a certain extent resist these views, my analysis of the representation of women in their poetry reveals that this resistance comes from the perspective of the male poet and is ultimately rejected in favor of established social ideas regarding female beauty and sexuality.

g) Romantic poetry often calls upon the forces of Nature to act upon or symbolize the imagination. This is especially evident in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" in which the poet commands the west wind to carry his message out into the world. For Shelley, the west wind symbolizes both the regenerative power of Nature and the inspirational power of the Muse. In a number of different ways, Shelley represents the wind's power of regeneration and inspiration, suggesting that it is Nature itself that inspires him. By looking at the poet's different images of the wind and how he wishes for it to act upon him, we can better understand the Romantic conception of Nature as a spiritual and inspirational force.

**Note that each of these sample paragraphs begins with a generality that has direct bearing on the subject of the paper. Each takes 2-3 sentences to work up to a specific statement of the thesis of the paper. Note also that each paragraph gives just enough specific information to give the reader a good idea of the paper's main argument; for example, in g, the**

writer tells us in fairly specific terms what the wind means for Shelley, but she does not yet reveal how *regenerative* or *inspirational* power is treated specifically.

In comparison papers, it is often best to set up the terms of the comparison in the first paragraph. In *e*, for example, the writer makes clear that it is Mill's terms that will be used for a discussion of Bronte's novel. In this comparison, one text is used as a guideline or standard for another. In *f*, on the other hand, neither Yeats' or Hardy's works will be treated as a guideline; instead, both works will be treated equally as responding to the same traditional ideas of women.

Note that in these examples the thesis statement comes at the end of the paragraph. This is fairly typical, especially in shorter papers (3-10 pp.). In longer papers, it is not unusual to find the thesis statement in a second or third paragraph; however, excessive throat clearing before a thesis might tax the reader's patience. Note that a thesis statement may take up two sentences (see *f*). Note also that in each of these examples the thesis statement comes as the most specific sentence in a sequence that begins fairly generally. Note finally that, as in *e*) and *g*), the writer uses the first-person plural. This usage allows the writer to avoid the passive voice. If we change the thesis from *e*) to the passive, we can note how much less effective it is.

h) Bronte's novel *can be examined* in light of Mill's ideas and Jane Eyre's struggle *can be discovered as being* not only that of a woman in a male-dominated society but also that of an individual in a world dominated by custom.

Note that this version is less direct and much more wordy than it needs to be. The advantage of the first-person plural is that it allows both directness and a degree of formality. It also suggests a certain community with the reader. Overuse or misuse of this perspective can lead to pomposity and may irritate a discriminating reader (see #16).

**3. Thesis Statements.** Merely summarizing an author's meaning is not the same thing as creating a thesis; the student must make clear how he or she will treat this meaning in the context of his or her interpretation of an author's work. A thesis statement is a sentence(s) that clearly and specifically states the main point of the argument or interpretation. Though it does not need to be so bluntly worded, it has the force of a statement like, *In this paper I will prove that . . .* Most successful thesis statements (like those in #2 *e*, *f*, and *g* above) tell the reader what the writer intends to prove and how he or she intends to prove it. In *e*) and

g), for example, the writers define their methods and then state the problems they will try to solve. In f), we find a variation. Here, the writer simply asserts that a certain tendency can be found in the poets she will examine and implies that her analysis will demonstrate the existence of this tendency. Both of these approaches (by far the most common in shorter papers) are acceptable, as are variations that clearly and pointedly articulate what the writer intends to do and, if only by implication, how he or she will do it. *A thesis is a statement of content, not of intent.*

**4. Paragraph Development.** Paragraphs also contain a particular analytical structure to prove their points well. A *topic sentence* does a job similar to that of a thesis statement, only it works on the paragraph level. For example, the first topic sentence in the paper on Mill and Bronte (see #2 e) might want to concentrate on Jane Eyre's early years.

a) Jane's struggle with her young cousin, John, prefigures her later relationships in a male-dominated society.

The succeeding paragraph (or paragraphs, for a topic sentence may refer to one or two paragraphs—even three in a longer paper) will then illustrate this statement with specific examples from the text. A second topic sentence might follow up on this one.

b) After Jane begins working for Edward Rochester, she begins to discern within herself new powers of resistance to the masculine authority that threatens her individuality.

Again, succeeding sentences will support this statement. A paper will have as many topic sentences as the thesis statement requires. There is no limit or minimum number.

**5. Paragraph, Lack of Focus and Development.** If a paragraph lacks a *topic sentence* then it will be difficult for the writer or the reader to know where the paragraph is going. A *topic sentence*, like a thesis statement, clearly states the main point of the paragraph; the sentences that follow support or back up that sentence. In some cases, two paragraphs can be guided by a single *topic sentence*, but even here the same rule applies: the paragraphs set out logically and systematically to demonstrate the validity of the opening statement. Without a *topic sentence*, the writer is in danger of making claims that are unfounded or insufficiently demonstrated. See #3.

Another problem that arises from a lack of topic sentences is an *insufficiently developed idea*. This indicates that the writer has not understood or worked out an idea thoroughly enough to make his or her point clear. Sometimes greater detail will help, but more often development problems require rethinking or thinking more deeply about the idea(s) in question. Insufficient development often occurs when the writer has failed to provide specific details of a process or an event, specific examples of a general idea, or specific reference to a text.

Finally, there is the problem of paragraph development falling into unnecessary *summary* or *paraphrase*. *Summary* is an attempt to give the general sense of a work or passage but in a way that substantially shorts the original work; *paraphrase* attempts to replicate a passage or work without necessarily attempting to shorten or abridge it. While *summary* condenses the main points, *paraphrase* tends simply to rephrase them; both may make use of the author's words in the process. While both *summary* and *paraphrase* are useful in literary analysis, they are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to constitute literary analysis.

**6. Paragraph Incoherence.** This problem is typically due to a lack of organization and/or planning. The effect is of a jumble of ideas haphazardly set down in writing. It can also occur when a writer makes statements that are so broad or unspecific that they do not contribute to the advancement of an argument and do not provide the opportunity to make logical connections between ideas. Problems of incoherence typically occur when the writer misuses logical markers such as *yet*, *because*, *thus*, *consequently*, and other similar terms. These terms imply logical (e.g., causal, syllogistic, contradictory) relationships; if these relationships are not clearly articulated then these terms cause confusion. A common source of incoherence in literary papers is to segregate thematic and technical elements. A successful paper combines both elements in one paragraph.

**7. Paragraph Length.** It is best to avoid short, undeveloped paragraphs (e.g. fewer than three sentences), except for the occasional transitional paragraph; transitional paragraphs typically mark a point at which an argument shifts direction or moves to a new phase. It is also best to avoid overly long, unfocused or undifferentiated paragraphs. The paragraph, like the sentence, is a single unit of thought; while paragraph length should be keyed to the complexity of the idea(s) being expressed, one should avoid paragraphs over 200 words in most cases.

**8. Analytical Structure and Prewriting Process.** Student writers often imitate the descriptive structure of the literature they interpret, especially fiction, in their critical papers and thus are not analytical enough. In general, critical writers need to inform readers not only about what is in a piece of literature but more importantly *why* it is there. This is the difference between descriptive and analytical. One might say the following about Flannery O'Connor's "The Misfit":

a) The misfit says that she would have been a good woman if there had been someone to shoot her first. This means that the misfit was being sarcastic because of the fact that the grandma had no good intentions until the moment of her death when she realized that it is too late.

These sentences are too cumbersome and have no analytical edge. The underlined parts should have been combined into a coherent statement.

b) The Misfit's statement that she would have been a good woman if there had been someone to shoot her every moment of her life implies his sarcasm.

Another common analytical error is the inclusion of the student's prewriting process, an error stemming from a lack of revising an early draft.

c) Faith represents Goodman Brown's actual faith in his religion and by analyzing how he interacts with her, one can see how Goodman Brown is not the holy man with genuine faith that he believes himself to be.

This sentence contains an implied action that was once necessary for the writer to arrive at the interpretation, but should have been edited out or stated more analytically. See #36 for Analytical Verbs.

d) Although Faith represents Goodman Brown's actual religious faith, his interactions with her demonstrate Goodman Brown's hypocrisy.

**9. Conclusions.** It is difficult to give examples of good conclusions, since there is little consensus on what makes a good one. A successful conclusion should leave the reader with a sense that he or she has reached the end of a logical and coherently developed process. A paper

should not simply end; this is an insult to a reader who has taken the time to read the paper.

How does one achieve the effect of a good conclusion? This is the difficult part. A paper could end effectively on the last point discussed, as long as that point sums up the main concerns of the paper as a whole. Another effective conclusion would suggest issues or problems that are not directly related to the paper's main concerns but which allows the writer to suggest a new way to regard those concerns. The advantage here is that the writer can end on a point that has not been brought up already; the disadvantage is that he or she might end up introducing a problem that requires too much information to make it work effectively.

A more manageable conclusion is one that sums up the main concerns of the paper in such a way that is not merely repetitive. The danger here is creating the kind of conclusion that begins, *In conclusion, I have discussed . . .* . . In any kind of paper, this kind of conclusion is inelegant; in a short paper, it is simply unnecessary. Try to find a way to sum up that puts the main points in a slightly different light that stresses a common thread or motif. It might even be a good idea to save a strong point or two (what some writers call *zinger*) for the conclusion. Nothing is more satisfying than an effective conclusion. The following conclusion to a paper on "The Collective Character" in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" embodies the virtues of a satisfying conclusion.

- a) "A Rose for Emily" is as much the story of a tongue-wagging town as it is that of a lonely madwoman. Somewhat ironically, the short story is also eerily contemporary to students in the 1990s. In short, speculation is inherently human, and speculation legitimized through mass-intrigue is positively titillating: we love a good tale of celebrity mishaps and errors in judgment, and we throw ourselves into catty contemplation with gusto when there are others to share our ecstasy. A huge psychological payoff, however, is demanded for our hyperbolic interest in other people's lives—we lose interest in our own lives. Like the townspeople, we often miss the big picture or lesson, usually inextricably connected to the details of another's mistakes or actions, and thus have nothing to enrich our own existence. "We" has not changed much.



**10. Literary Analysis.** Literary analysis can come in a number of different forms. In *thematic analysis*, the writer is concerned with demonstrating how a particular theme is represented. A work's theme (revenge in *Hamlet*, greed in *Bleak House*), paralysis in *Dubliners*, alienation in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock") may dictate different interpretive methods. One work might call for an emphasis on character (as in *Dubliners* or *Bleak House*, while another might call for an emphasis on the relations between characters (as in *Hamlet*), and still another might call for an emphasis on language (as in "Prufrock").

The *analysis of character* involves an exploration of the psychological, sociological, and historical aspects of characters in literary works. For instance, one might write an essay on the psychological problems of Lord Jim or one might look at the Wife of Bath from a sociological perspective that would emphasize her relevance for feminist theory or one could analyze the characters in a Dickens novel in historical or socio-historical terms.

The *analysis of figurative language* is concerned with patterns of symbols, images, metaphors (or other rhetorical figures) and what they mean. For instance, a writer might investigate religious symbols in *The Faerie Queene* or symbols of nature in *The Prelude* or images of confinement in *Little Dorrit* or metaphors of artistic creation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In such analyses, the writer is primarily concerned with specific instances of the figurative language in question; this kind of analysis requires a fine discrimination among the various figures and a willingness to look for and explain the relevance of specific examples.

**11. Poetry Explication, Definition.** A Poetry Explication is the special kind of analysis of poetry. As its Latin root (*explicare*, to unravel) implies, explication is a very close reading of a poem that attempts to understand (by unraveling) the various aspects of its structure. Explications often emphasize (though not necessarily all of these or in any particular order) rhetorical figures (metaphor, symbol, metonymy, prosopopoeia, etc.), imagery, meter, rhythm, diction, sound properties, and a variety of less technical linguistic features. Explications may also emphasize the generic form of a work (ode, short lyric, sonnet, dramatic monologue, etc.). Despite their emphasis on structure, the best explications will use close analysis in order to say something about what a poem means. Thus, one way of thinking about explication is to regard it as a way of articulating meaning through the analysis of structural and formal properties. Merely listing the instances of a particular rhetorical figure or indicating the meter of a poem's lines does not constitute explication nor does it tell the reader anything about the poem's meaning.

There is no one way to explicate a poem. One can be more or less “technical,” depending on the kind of poem one is analyzing. Formalist poetry, for example, is far more amenable to prosodic than free verse. In any case, the kind of explication one attempts ought to be suited to the kind of poem under analysis. In the following examples of explication, the first features more technical prosodic approach, the latter a more thematic approach.

## **12. Samples of Poetry Explication.**

*a)* Professor Robert E. Bjork’s Poetry Explication of X. J. Kennedy’s “Nothing in Heaven Functions as it Ought.”

Nothing in heaven functions as it ought:  
Peter’s bifocals, blindly sat on, crack;  
His gates lurch wide with the cackle of a cock,  
Not turn with a hush of gold as Milton had thought;  
Gangs of the slaughtered innocents keep huffing        5  
The nimbus off the Venerable Bede  
Like that of an old dandelion gone to seed;  
And the beatific choir keep breaking up, coughing.

But Hell, sleek Hell has no freewheeling part:  
None takes his own sweet time, none quickens pace.    10  
Ask anyone, How come you here, poor heart?—  
And he will slot a quarter through his face,  
You’ll hear an instant click, a tear will start  
Imprinted with an abstract of his case.

Kennedy exploits the concept of norm and deviation in this sonnet to deal with the nature of heaven and hell, questioning our conventional notions about each. The general strategy seems initially clear, even obvious: the description of heaven properly belongs to hell, that of hell to heaven. But closer reading reveals more complexity. The malfunctioning sonnet becomes the perfect vehicle for the poet’s message as he comments on the limitations of traditional views.

The poet uses the Petrarchan form, but varies that form subtly. First he creates the expected structural and thematic division between octave and sestet and then employs a rhyme scheme approaching the conventional Petrarchan mode. But he uses slant rhyme in the octave at lines 2, 3, 5, and 8 (abca deef) and makes the sestet peculiarly regular (ghghgh). Normally the Petrarchan sonnet displays high regularity in the octave (abba abba) and some irregularity in the sestet (cde cde / cdc dcd). Kennedy overturns the convention of form itself to overturn the convention of our accepted values; and by disrupting or conforming to

tradition, he emphasizes meaning in both sections of the poem. Nothing in heaven, or in this sonnet, functions as it ought.

The poet similarly manipulates meter. Whereas iambic pentameter, with occasional trochaic or spondaic substitutions, usually characterizes the sonnet, the meter here is chaotic in the octave, regular in the sestet, once more coinciding with the meaning of each. Lines 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 are all hypermetric, and lines 5-6 display enjambment while caesurae appear unpredictably throughout the octave. These technical features contrast significantly with the strict iambic pentameter, end-stopped lines, and predictable rhythm in the sestet.

Finally, imagery and diction work within the pattern of established and defeated expectations in the poem. Two words are important in the first line, establishing the machine imagery to be fully aborted in the octave and fully developed in the sestet. “Nothing” and “functions” call up images of mere objects, mere things, in motion, but are followed not only by “bifocals” and “gates” but by “gangs” and “choirs” and by rich, vibrant, and seemingly disorganized, uncontrolled imagery. The personified gates “lurch” instead of swing and produce an incongruous noise that shifts our attention from the personified gates to the image of a rooster. Instead of choruses of slaughtered innocents, we have gangs of them in riotous, playful disarray, “huffing” the transfigured halo off Bede. And the angelic choir giggles and coughs, not keeping to its business. There is real delight in disorder here, and the mercurial imagery flows with the shifting sense of life and vigor that accounts for the octave’s vibrant tone.

The sestet, on the other hand, turns slowly and methodically on static, uniform, mechanistic imagery with neither “freewheeling” nor extraneous part. The word “none” here complements “nothing” in the octave, and Kennedy uses it just as ironically. The pronoun usually refers to people, living beings, but the creatures in Kennedy’s hell, or a more conventional poet’s heaven, become things, parts in a machine programmed for specific action, producing a uniform sound and only on command. The “none” in line 10 becomes the “anyone” in line 11 and finally the universal “he” in line 12. And the single “click” emitted from him differs considerably from the multifarious “cracking,” “cackling,” “hushing,” “huffing,” “breaking,” and “coughing” of the octave. No individuals people hell; no variety adorns it. Kennedy uses imagery and diction, like form and meter, to underscore meaning and intensify the markedly ironic, Shavian tone of his ostensibly simple poem. (Reprinted from *The Explicator* 40.2 [1982]: 6-7 with the author’s permission.)

b) A student's explication of Mona van Duyn's poem "Leda." Since van Duyn's poem is a response to William Butler Yeats' famous sonnet "Leda and the Swan," both poems are given here to provide the context of the original assignment.

### **Leda and the Swan**

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push    5  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower    10  
And Agamemnon dead.

  Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

### **Leda**

*"Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?"*

Not even for a moment. He knew, for one thing, what he was.  
When he saw the swan in her eyes he could let her drop.  
In the first look of love men find their great disguise,  
and collecting these rape pictures of himself was his life.

Her body became the consequence of his juice,    5  
while her mind closed on a bird and went to sleep.  
Later, with the children in school, she opened her eyes  
and saw her own openness, and felt relief.

In men's stories her life ended with his loss.  
She stiffened under the storm of his wings to a glassy shape. 10  
stricken and mysterious and immortal. But the fact is,  
she was not, for such an ending, abstract enough.

She tried for a while to understand what it was  
that had happened, and then decided to let it drop.  
She married a smaller man with a beaky nose, 15  
and melted away in the storm of everyday life.

Leda: van Duyn's Realistic View of an Unrealistic Character  
by Brady Crace

Mona van Duyn's poem "Leda" is a response to Yeats' famous work "Leda and the Swan," which implies that Leda may have reaped some benefit from her rape. Van Duyn's work refutes this implication and presents an incarnation of Leda that is radically different from that proposed by mythology, and later, by Yeats. Furthermore, van Duyn's speaker accuses Yeats of the insensitive treatment of a serious crime and basic misunderstanding of human nature. The author employs a logical progression of four quatrains, vivid imagery, and strong analogies to deny Yeats' assertion and to portray Leda and Zeus as representative figures for all men and women.

In the first quatrain, the speaker not only responds directly to Yeats' final two lines, which suggest mutual benefit, but also creates an analogy between Zeus and all men. Line 1 refutes Yeats' assertion and lays the burden of guilt squarely upon the god by suggesting that "He knew . . . what he was," implying that Leda was taken without any knowledge of her ravager's identity or power. The imagery of Zeus seeing his reflection in Leda's eyes, recognizing the love there, and letting her "drop" (2) from his grasp leaves us with a dark and sinister impression of the god's intent. In line 3, the speaker equates the god's action with behavior that is typical for all men, creating a strong association between the god and every man. This analogy is continued in the fourth line; while the speaker refers specifically to Zeus, the conspicuous use of the word "and" at the beginning of the line implies an equivalence between his actions and those of mundane man that precede them. The speaker suggests that the entire reason for Zeus' and, by association, man's existence is the collection of "look[s] of love" (3) or "rape pictures" (4) from his victims, whom he subsequently abandons. The imagery in this quatrain creates the impression of female exploitation by a cool, calculating male; men are described as having a "disguise" (3) and Zeus calmly "collect[s] . . . rape pictures" (4), effectively vilifying both. We are

left with the impression that, if we look closely, we can see the ancient myth from a new perspective.

The first two lines of the second stanza present us with the aftermath of the rape and the consequences for Leda. The speaker suggests that her violation has far-reaching consequences. Her pain does not end with the completion of the rape; rather, her “body bec[omes] the consequences of his juice” (5). The speaker further asserts this loss of control by suggesting that Leda’s mind, so intent on the “bird” (6), is “closed” (6) and goes “to sleep” (6). The short, end-stopped lines support this impression of dehumanization and create a feeling of a loss of identity; the mind, which controls humanity, suborns itself to the body. Lines 7 and 8 take us beyond these strictures of the myth and re-humanize Leda. The conspicuous enjambment between these two lines enhances the actions of opening her eyes and regaining self-possession and control. We see a stark contrast between the imagery and her “closed” (6) mind that is “asleep” (6) and the “openness” (8) and “relief” (8) that she feels after time has passed. The mundane image of the children being “in school” (7) creates an analogy between mythological Leda and contemporary woman, just as Zeus is equated to contemporary man in the first quatrain. The equivocation serves to bring us deeper into the poem, giving us a context from which we are better able to empathize with Leda. Through this context and the use of intense imagery, not only can we see the vivid image of Leda opening her eyes after so much time, but we can also experience the heady relief she feels from her rediscovered awareness.

The third stanza indicts Yeats and the original author of the myth with the creation of an unreal, unbelievable character. The speaker rejects the traditional characterization that presents us with a woman who, “In men’s stories” (9), is “abstract” (12), “stiffened” (10), “glassy” (10), “stricken” (11), “mysterious” (11), and “immortal” (11). The strong imagery of these terms suggests that the authors have a tainted view of their subject; consequently, Leda is not realistically represented by their flat character. Because of this, the picture that these men paint in their works is incomplete, stilted, and somewhat insulting. There is a sense that Leda’s situation is much closer to reality than these “men’s stories” (9) allow. The speaker asserts that because Leda’s situation is so similar to that of other women, the conclusions that the men create are spurious, only applicable to a fanciful character; Leda is not “abstract enough” (12). The loss of Zeus and the end of the rape do not predicate the end of Leda’s life; the speaker implies that a woman reacts quite differently than the male authors suggest. In effect, the “men’s stories” (9) have failed by creating a myth that impinges closely upon reality without reflecting it accurately.

The fourth stanza takes us beyond the rape, to a time that neither Yeats nor the author of the myth seems to consider. The speaker takes us into Leda's mind and shows us a more humanistic reaction to the rape. Van Duyn repeats the terminal words from the first quatrain to create strong parallels with the final quatrain, reminding us of Yeats' premise of mutual reward. In line one, the speaker states that Zeus "knew . . . what he was"; in line 13, Leda "trie[s] to understand what it was." This association has the effect of underscoring the fact that Zeus, the rapist, understands what is happening during the rape; Leda, the victim, even many years later, cannot logically comprehend what has happened to her. And just as Zeus lets Leda "drop" (2) effectively out of his life and mind, she too lets the rape "drop" (14) from her consciousness; rather than "stiffen[ing]" (10) and dying, she goes on with her life. She eventually frees herself from the confusion of the rape and gets married; the image of the "smaller man with a beaky nose" (15) not only creates a strong correlation between Zeus and her husband but also serves as a constant reminder of the rape. In lines 4 and 15, the repetition of the terminal word "life" enhances the contract between Zeus' life of "collecting . . . rape pictures" (4) and the "storm of his wings" (10) to the "storm of everyday life" (16) that eventually claims Leda as she "melt[s] away" (16). We are left with the impression that Leda, as any woman, is able to absorb this horrible rape, ignore its constant reminders, and continue her life. The rape neither destroys her nor confers any benefit upon her; it is, in fact, a single crisis in the larger story of her life, despite what "men's stories" (9) might assert.