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Writing About Character

The People in Literature

Writers of fiction create narratives that enhance and deepen our understanding of human character and human life. In our own day, under the influences of pioneers like Freud, Jung, and Skinner, the science of psychology has influenced both the creation and the study of literature. It is well known that Freud buttressed some of his psychological conclusions by referring to literary works, especially plays by Shakespeare. Widely known films such as *Spellbound* (1945) and *The Snake Pit* (1948) have popularized the relationships between literary character and psychology. Without doubt, the presentation and understanding of character is a major aim of fiction (and literature generally).

In literature, a **character** is a verbal representation of a human being as presented to us by authors through the depiction of actions, conversations, descriptions, reactions, inner thoughts and reflections, and also through the authors' own interpretive commentary. The goal of literary characterization is to present not just the externally perceived person, but also—and primarily—the inner person, the secret self: those expressed and unexpressed inner thoughts, aims, motives, aspirations, joys, fears, obsessions, and frustrations that collectively make up human personalities. Of course, authors want to present characters to us whom we care about, cheer for, and even love, although they also present characters whom we dislike, laugh at, or even hate.

In a story or play emphasizing a major character, you may expect that each action or speech, no matter how small, is part of a total presentation of the complex combination of both the inner and the outer self that constitutes a human being. Whereas in life things may "just happen," in literature all actions, interactions, speeches, and observations are deliberate. Thus, you read about important actions like a long period of work and sacrifice (Maupassant's "The Necklace"), the exciting discovery of a previously unknown literary work (Keats's "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer"), a bizarre defiance of fate (Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death"), or a young man's fanciful but poignantly hopeless dream of freedom (Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"). By making such actions interesting, authors help you understand and appreciate not only their major characters but also life itself.

Character Traits

In studying a literary character, try to determine the character's outstanding traits. A trait is a quality of mind or habitual mode of behavior that is evident in both active and passive ways, such as never repaying borrowed money, supplying moral support to friends and loved ones, being a person on whom people rely, being willing to listen to the thoughts and problems of others, avoiding eye contact, taking the biggest portions, or always thinking oneself the center of attention. Sometimes, of course, the traits we encounter are minor and therefore negligible, but often a trait may be a person's *primary* characteristic (not only in fiction but also in life). Thus, characters may be ambitious or lazy, serene or anxious, aggressive or fearful, thoughtful or inconsiderate, open or secretive, confident or self-doubting, kind or cruel, quiet or noisy, visionary or practical, careful or careless, impartial or biased, straightforward or underhanded, "winners" or "losers," and so on.

With this sort of list, to which you may add at will, you can analyze and develop conclusions about character. For example, Mathilde in Maupassant's "The Necklace" indulges in dreams of unattainable wealth and comfort and is so swept up in her visions that she scorns her comparatively good life with her reliable but dull husband. It is fair to say that this aversion to reality is her major trait. It is also a major weakness, because Maupassant shows how her dream life harms her real life. By contrast, the speaker of Lowell's poem "Patterns" considers her hopes for happiness destroyed because she has just learned that her fiancé has just been killed in battle. Because she faces her difficulties directly, she exhibits strength. By similarly probing into the actions, speeches, and thoughts of the literary characters you encounter, you can also draw conclusions about their qualities and strengths.

Distinguish Between Circumstances and Character Traits

When you study a fictional person, distinguish between circumstances and character, for circumstances have value *only if they demonstrate important traits and qualities of character*. Thus, if our friend Sam wins a lottery, let us congratulate him on his luck; but the win does not say much about his *character*—not much, that is, unless we also learn that for several years he has been regularly spending hundreds of dollars each week for lottery tickets. In other words, making the effort to win a lottery *is* a character trait but winning (or losing) *is not*.

Or, let us suppose that an author stresses the neatness of one character and the sloppiness of another. If you accept the premise that people care for their appearance according to choice—and that choices develop from character—you can use these details to make conclusions about a person's self-esteem or the lack of it. In short, when reading about characters in literature, look beyond circumstances, actions, and appearances, and attempt to determine what these things show about character. Always try to get from the outside to the inside, for it is the internal quality of character that determines external behavior.

How Authors Disclose Character in Literature

Authors use five methods of bringing their characters to life. Remember that you must use your own knowledge and experience to make judgments about the qualities of the characters being revealed.

Actions by Characters Reveal Their Qualities

What characters *do* is our best clue to understanding what they *are*. For example, the character Farquhar in Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" tries to sabotage the Union army's railway system near his country estate. This action shows both loyalty (to the Confederate cause) and personal bravery, despite the fact that he is caught. Often characters are unaware of the meanings and implications of their actions. Smirnov in Chekhov's play *The Bear*, for example, would be a fool to teach Mrs. Popov to use her dueling pistol because she has threatened to kill him with it. Even before he recognizes his love for her, he is subconsciously aware of this love, and potentially self-destructive and comic action shows that his loving nature has overwhelmed his instinct for self-preservation.

Actions may also signal qualities such as naiveté, weakness, deceit, a scheming personality, inner conflict, sudden realization, or other growth or change. Powerful inner conflicts are brought out by Glaspell within the two women in *Trifles*. The women both recognize their strong obligation to the letter of the law, but as the play progresses they discover an even stronger personal obligation to the accused killer, Minnie. Hence, under these new circumstances, they show their adaptability and their willingness to change.

The Author's Descriptions Tell Us About Characters

Appearance and environment reveal much about a character's social and economic status, and they also tell us about character traits. Mathilde in Maupassant's "The Necklace" dreams about wealth and unlimited purchasing power. Although her unrealizable desires destroy her way of life, they also cause her character strength to emerge. The descriptions of country folkways in Hardy's "The Three Strangers" are independently interesting and unique, but they also make plain the personal loyalty of the peasants and their social stability and solidity.

What Characters Say—Dramatic Statements and Thoughts—Reveals What They Are Like

Although the speeches of most characters are functional—essential to keeping the action moving along—they provide material from which you may draw conclusions. When the second traveler of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" speaks, for example, he reveals his devious and deceptive nature

even though ostensibly he appears friendly. The sheriff and county attorney in Glaspell's *Trifles* speak straightforwardly and directly, and these speeches suggest that their characters are similarly orderly. Their constant ridicule of the two women, however, indicates their limitations.

Characters may also use speech to obscure their motives, perhaps by lying, perhaps by omitting details. The first stranger, Timothy Summers, of Hardy's "The Three Strangers," speaks easily and comfortably in order to keep the natives—and the second stranger, the Hangman—from knowing his true identity. Even when he is alone with the Hangman he speaks easily but ambiguously so that the hangman will have no clues about who he really is.

What Others Say Tells Us About a Character

By studying what characters say about each other, you can enhance your understanding of the character being discussed. Glaspell's *Trifles* is unique in this regard because the farm housewife, Minnie, is the center of attention and discussion even though she does not appear in the drama at all. Everything we learn about her is gained from the dialogue and actions of those characters who are actually onstage.

Ironically, speeches often indicate something other than what the speakers intend, perhaps because of prejudice, stupidity, or foolishness. The sister Nora in O'Connor's "First Confession" for example, tells about her brother Jackie's attempted violence against her, but in effect she describes Jackie's individuality just as she also discloses her own spitefulness.

The Author, Speaking as a Storyteller or an Observer, May Present Judgments About Characters

What the author, speaking as a work's authorial voice, says about a character is usually accurate, and the authorial voice can be accepted factually. However, when the authorial voice interprets actions and characteristics, as in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," the author himself or herself assumes the role of a reader or critic, whose opinions are therefore open to question. For this reason, authors frequently avoid interpretations and devote their skill to arranging events and speeches so that readers can draw their own conclusions.

Types of Characters: Round and Flat

No writer can present an entire life history of a protagonist, nor can each character in a story get "equal time" for development. Accordingly, some characters grow to be full and alive, while others remain shadowy. The British novelist and critic E. M. Forster, in his critical work *Aspects of the Novel*, calls the two major types "round" and "flat."

Round Characters Undergo Change

The basic trait of **round characters** is that we learn enough about them to permit us to conclude that they are full, lifelike, and memorable. Their roundness and fullness are characterized by both individuality and unpredictability. A complementary quality about round characters is therefore that they are **dynamic**. That is, they *recognize, change with,* or *adjust to* circumstances. Such changes may be shown in (1) an action or actions, (2) the realization of new strength and therefore the affirmation of previous decisions, (3) the acceptance of a new condition and the need for making changes, or (4) the discovery of unrecognized truths. We may consider Jackie, of O'Connor's "First Confession," as round and dynamic. We learn from his adult narration that he is a normal and typical child, trying to maintain his sense of individuality amid what he considers to be embarrassing family circumstances. His thoughts about "solutions" to his problems are of course greatly in excess, but when the time comes for him to confess his "sins," he does not evade them, but dutifully states everything that he has been thinking. As amusing as his story is, his confession about the truth of his inner thoughts constitutes the type of adjustment that characterizes him as a dynamic character.

Because a round character usually plays a major role in a story, he or she is often called the **hero** or **heroine**. Some round characters are not particularly heroic, however, so it is preferable to use the more neutral word **protagonist** (the "first actor"). The protagonist is central to the action, moves against an **antagonist** (the "opposing actor") and exhibits the ability to adapt to new circumstances.

Flat Characters Stay the Same

Unlike round characters, **flat characters** do not grow. They remain the same because they lack knowledge or insight, or because they are stupid or insensitive. They end where they begin and thus are **static**, not dynamic. Flat characters are not worthless in fiction, however, for they highlight the development of the round characters, as with the sheriff and county attorney in Glaspell's *Trifles*. Usually, flat characters are minor (e.g., relatives, acquaintances, functionaries), but not all minor characters are necessarily flat.

Sometimes flat characters are prominent in certain types of literature, such as westerns, and police and detective stories, where the focus is less on character than on performance. Such characters might be lively and engaging, even though they do not develop or change. They must be strong, tough, and clever enough to perform recurring tasks such as solving a crime, overcoming a villain, or finding a treasure. The term **stock character** refers to characters in these repeating situations. To the degree that stock characters have many common traits, they are **representative** of their class or group. Such characters, with variations in names, ages, and sexes, have been constant in literature since the ancient Greeks. Some regular stock characters are the insensitive father, the interfering mother, the sassy younger sister or brother, the greedy politician, the resourceful cattle rancher or detective, the overbearing or henpecked husband, the submissive or nagging wife, the angry police captain, the lovable drunk, and the town do-gooder.

Stock characters stay flat as long as they do no more than perform their roles and exhibit conventional and unindividual traits. When they possess no attitudes except those of their class, they are often called **stereotype** characters, because they all seem to have been cast in the same mold.

When authors bring characters into focus, however, no matter what roles they perform, the characters emerge from flatness and move into roundness. Such a character is Louise Mallard of Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." Louise is a traditional housewife, and if she were no more than that she would be flat and stereotypical. After receiving the news that her husband has died, however, she becomes round because of her sudden and unexpected exhilaration at the prospect of being free. One may compare Louise with the title character of Mansfield's "Miss Brill." At first Miss Brill seems quite dull. She almost literally has no life, and as a character she is flat. But the story demonstrates that she protects herself interestingly by indulging in remarkable imagination and creativity. She is, finally, a round character. In sum, the ability to grow and develop and to be altered by circumstances makes characters round and dynamic. Absence of these traits makes characters flat and static.

Reality and Probability: Verisimilitude

Characters in fiction should be true to life. Therefore their actions, statements, and thoughts must all be what human beings are *likely* to do, say, and think under the conditions presented in the literary work. This is the standard of **verisimilitude**, **probability**, or **plausibility**. One may readily admit that there are people *in life* who perform tasks or exhibit characteristics that are difficult or seemingly impossible (such as always leading the team to victory, always getting *A*+'s on every test, always being cheerful and helpful, or always understanding the needs of others). However, such characters *in fiction* would not be true to life because they do not fit within *normal* or *usual* behavior.

You should therefore distinguish between what characters may *possibly* do and what they *most frequently* or *most usually* do. Thus, in Maupassant's "The Necklace" it is possible that Mathilde could be truthful and tell her friend Jeanne Forrestier about the lost necklace. In light of her pride and sense of self-respect, however, it is more in character for her and her husband to hide the loss and borrow money for a replacement, even though they must endure the ill consequences for ten years. Granted the possibilities of the story (either self-sacrifice or the admission of a fault or a possible crime), the decision she makes with her husband is the more *probable* one.

Nonetheless, probability does not rule out surprise or even exaggeration. The sudden and seemingly impossible changes concluding *The Bear*, for example, are not improbable because Chekhov early in the play shows that both

Mrs. Popov and Smirnov are emotional, somewhat foolish, and impulsive. Even in the face of their unpredictable embraces closing the play, these qualities of character dominate their lives. For such individuals, surprise may be accepted as a probable condition of life.

Writers render probability of character in many ways. Works that attempt to mirror life—realistic, naturalistic, or "slice of life" stories like Hardy's "The Three Strangers"—set up a pattern of everyday probability. Less realistic conditions establish different frameworks of probability, in which characters are *expected* to be unusual. Such an example is Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." Because a major way of explaining this story is that Brown is having a nightmarish psychotic trance, his bizarre and unnatural responses are probable. Equally probable is the way the doctors explain Louise Mallard's sudden death at the end of Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" even though their smug analysis is totally and ironically wrong.

You might also encounter works containing *supernatural* figures such as the second traveler in "Young Goodman Brown." You may wonder whether such characters are probable or improbable. Usually, gods and goddesses embody qualities of the best and most moral human beings, and devils like Hawthorne's guide take on attributes of the worst. However, you might remember that the devil is often given dashing and engaging qualities so that he can deceive gullible sinners and then drag them into the fiery pits of hell. The friendliness of Brown's guide is therefore not an improbable trait. In judging characters of this or any other type, your best criteria are probability, consistency, and believability.

Writing About Character

Usually your topic will be a major character in a story or drama, although you might also study one or more minor characters. After your customary overview, begin taking notes. List as many traits as you can, and also determine how the author presents details about the character through actions, appearance, speeches, comments by others, or authorial explanations. If you discover unusual traits, determine what they show. The following suggestions and questions will help you get started.

Raise Questions to Discover Ideas

- Who is the major character? What do you learn about this character from his or her own actions and speeches? From the speeches and actions of other characters? How else do you learn about the character?
- How important is the character to the work's principal action? Which characters oppose the major character? How do the major character and the opposing character(s) interact? What effects do these interactions create?
- What actions bring out important traits of the main character? To what degree is the character creating events, or just responding to them?

- Describe the main character's actions: Are they good or bad, intelligent or stupid, deliberate or spontaneous? How do they help you understand her or him?
- Describe and explain the traits, both major and minor, of the character you plan to discuss. To what extent do the traits permit you to judge the character? What is your judgment?
- What descriptions (if any) of how the character looks do you discover in the story? What does this appearance demonstrate about him or her?
- In what ways is the character's major trait a strength—or a weakness? As the story progresses, to what degree does the trait become more (or less) prominent?
- Is the character round and dynamic? How does the character recognize, change with, or adjust to circumstances?
- If the character you are analyzing is flat or static, what function does he or she perform in the story (for example, by doing a task or by bringing out qualities of the major character)?
- If the character is a stereotype, to what type does he or she belong? To what degree does the character stay in the stereotypical role or rise above it? How?
- What do any of the other characters do, say, or think to give you understanding of the character you are analyzing? What does the character say or think about himself or herself? What does the storyteller or narrator say? How valid are these comments and insights? How helpful in providing insights into the character?
- Is the character lifelike or unreal? Consistent or inconsistent? Believable or not believable?

Organize Your Essay About Character

Introduction Identify the character you are studying, and refer to noteworthy problems in determining this character's qualities.

Body Use your central idea and thesis sentence to create the form for the body of your essay. Consider one of the following approaches to organize your ideas and form the basis for your essay.

1. **Develop a central trait or major characteristic**, such as "the habit of seeing the world only on one's own terms" (Miss Brill of Mansfield's "Miss Brill"). This kind of structure should be organized to show how the work brings out the trait. For example, one story might use dramatic speeches to bring the character to life (Minnie of *Trifles*). Another story might employ just the character's speech and actions (the Third Stranger of Hardy's "The Three Strangers"). Studying the trait thus enables you to focus on the ways in which the author presents the character, and it also enables you to focus on separate parts of the work.
2. **Explain a character's growth or change.** This type of essay describes a character's traits at the work's beginning and then analyzes changes or

developments. It is important to stress the actual alterations as they emerge, but at the same time to avoid retelling the story. Additionally, you should not only describe the changing traits but also analyze how they are brought out within the work, such as the dream of Goodman Brown or Minnie Wright's long ordeal.

3. **Organize your essay around central actions, objects, or quotations that reveal primary characteristics.** Key incidents may stand out (such as using a breadknife to strike out against a person), along with objects closely associated with the character being analyzed (such as a broken birdcage). There may be important quotations spoken by the character or by someone else in the work. Show how such elements serve as signposts or guides to understanding the character. (See the following demonstrative essay for an illustration of this type of development.)
4. **Develop qualities of a flat character or characters.** If the character is flat (such as the sheriff and county attorney in *Trifles* or the servants in *The Bear*), you might develop topics such as the function and relative significance of the character, the group the character represents, the relationship of the flat character to the round ones, the importance of this relationship, and any additional qualities or traits. For a flat character, you should explain the circumstances or defects that keep the character from being round, as well as the importance of these shortcomings in the author's presentation of character.

Conclusion When bringing your essay to a close, show how the character's traits are related to the work as a whole. If the person was good but came to a bad end, does this misfortune make him or her seem especially worthy? If the person suffers, does the suffering suggest any attitudes about the class or type of which he or she is a part? Or does it illustrate the author's general view of human life? Or both? Do the characteristics explain why the person helps or hinders other characters? How does your essay help to clear up first-reading misunderstandings?

Demonstrative Essay

The Character of Minnie Wright in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*°

[1] Minnie Wright is Glaspell's major character in *Trifles*. We learn about her, however, not from seeing and hearing her, for she is not a speaking or an acting character in the play, but rather from the secondhand evidence provided by the story's actual characters. Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer, tells about Minnie's behavior after the dead body of her husband, John, was found. Mrs. Hale, Hale's wife, tells about Minnie's young womanhood and about how she became alienated from her nearest neighbors because of John's stingy and unfriendly ways. Both Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, the

°See pages 358–367 for this play.

sheriff's wife, make observations about Minnie based on the condition of her kitchen. From this information we get a full portrait of Minnie, who has changed from passivity to destructive assertiveness.* Her change in character is indicated by her clothing, her dead canary, and her unfinished patchwork quilt.†

[2] The clothes that Minnie has worn in the past and in the present indicate her character as a person of charm who has withered under neglect and contempt. Martha mentions Minnie's attractive and colorful dresses as a young woman, even recalling a "white dress with blue ribbons" (speech 134). Martha also recalls that Minnie, when young, was "sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery" (speech 107). In light of these recollections, Martha observes that Minnie had changed, and changed for the worse, during her long years of marriage with John Wright, who is characterized as "a raw wind that gets to the bone" (speech 104). As more evidence for Minnie's acceptance of her drab life, Mrs. Peters says that Minnie asks for no more than an apron and a shawl when under arrest in the sheriff's home. This modest clothing, as contrasted with the colorful dresses of her youth, suggests how her spirit has been suppressed.

[3] The end of this suppression of spirit and also the emergence of Minnie's rage is shown by the discovery of her dead canary. We learn that Minnie, who when young had been in love with music, has endured her cheerless farm home for thirty years. During this time her husband's contempt has made her life solitary, cheerless, unmusical, and depressingly impoverished. But her buying the canary (speech 87) suggests the reemergence of her love of song, just as it also suggests her growth toward self-assertion. That her husband wrings the bird's neck may thus be seen as the cause not only of her immediate sorrow, shown by the dead bird in a "pretty box" (speech 109), but also of the anger that marks her change from a stock, obedient wife to a person angry enough to kill.

[4] Like her love of song, her unfinished quilt indicates her creativity. In her dreary and abused years on the farm, never having had children, she has had nothing creative to do except for needlework like the quilt. Mrs. Hale comments on the beauty of Minnie's log-cabin design (speech 72) and observes the colorful patches of cloth in her sewing basket (speech 71, speech direction). The inference is that even though Minnie's life has been bleak, she has been able to indulge her characteristic love of color and form—and also of warmth, granted the purpose of a quilt.

[5] Ironically, the quilt also shows Minnie's creativity in the murder of her husband. Both Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters interpret the breakdown of her stitching on the quilt as signs of her distress about the dead canary and also of her nervousness in planning revenge. Further, even though nowhere in the play is it said that John is strangled with a quilting knot, no other conclusion is possible. Both Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters agree that Minnie probably intended to knot the quilt rather than sew it in a quilt stitch, and Glaspell pointedly causes the men to learn this detail even though they

*Central idea.
†Thesis sentence.

scoff at it and ignore it. In other words, we learn that Minnie's only outlet for creativity—needlework—has enabled her to perform the murder in the only way she can, by strangling John with a slip-proof quilting knot. Even though her plan for the murder is deliberate—Mrs. Peters reports that the arrangement of the rope was "strange," and a "funny way to kill" (speech 65)—Minnie is not cold or remorseless. Her passivity after the crime demonstrates that planning to evade guilt, beyond simple denial, is not in her character. She is not so diabolically creative that she plans or even understands the irony of strangling her husband (he killed the bird by wringing its neck). Glaspell, however, makes the irony plain.

[6] It is important to emphasize again that we learn about Minnie from others. Nevertheless, Minnie is fully realized, round, and poignant. For the greater part of her adult life, she has patiently accepted her drab and colorless marriage even though it is so cruelly different from her youthful expectations. In the dreary surroundings of the Wright farm, she suppresses her grudges, just as she suppresses her prettiness, colorfulness, and creativity. In short, she has been nothing more than a flat character. The killing of the canary, however, causes her to change and to destroy her husband in an assertive rejection of her stock role as the suffering wife. She is a patient woman whose patience finally reaches the breaking point.

Commentary on the Essay

The strategy of the argument of this essay is to use details from the story to support the central idea that Minnie Wright is a round, developing character. Hence the essay illustrates strategy 3 described on page 74. Other plans of organization could also have been chosen, such as the qualities of acquiescence, fortitude, and potential for anger (strategy 1); the change in Minnie from submission to vengefulness (strategy 2); or the reported actions of Minnie's singing, knotting quilts, and sitting in the kitchen on the morning after the murder (another way to use strategy 3).

Because Minnie does not appear in the story but is described only in the words of the major characters, the introductory paragraph of the demonstrative essay deals with the way we learn about her. The essay thus highlights how Glaspell uses methods 2 and 4 (see pages 68–69) as the ways of rendering the story's main character, while omitting strategies 1, 3 and 5.

The essay's argument is developed through inferences made from details in the story, namely Minnie's clothing (paragraph 2), her canary (paragraph 3), and her quilt (paragraphs 4 and 5). The last paragraph summarizes a number of these details, and it also considers how Minnie transcends the stock qualities of her role as a farm wife and gains roundness as a result of her outbreak against her husband.

As a study in composition, paragraph 3 demonstrates how discussion of a specific character trait, together with related details, can contribute to the essay's main argument. The trait is Minnie's love of music (shown by her canary). The

connecting details, selected from study notes, are the loss of music in her life, her isolation, her lack of pretty clothing, the contemptibility of her husband, and her grief when putting the dead bird into the box. In short, the paragraph weaves together enough material to show the relationship between Minnie's trait of loving music and the crisis of her developing anger—a change that marks her as a round character.

Special Topics for Studying and Discussing Character

1. Compare the ways in which actions and speeches are used to bring out the character traits of Farquhar of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and of Prospero of "The Masque of the Red Death."
2. Write a brief essay comparing the changes or developments of two major or round characters in stories or plays included in Appendix C. You might deal with issues such as what the characters are like at the beginning; what conflicts they confront, deal with, or avoid; or what qualities are brought out that signal the changes or developments.
3. Compare the qualities and functions of two or more flat characters (e.g., the men in *Trifles* or the secondary characters in "The Story of an Hour"). How do they bring out qualities of the major characters? What do you discover about their own character traits?
4. Using Miss Brill ("Miss Brill"), Minnie Wright (*Trifles*), and Farquhar ("An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge") as examples, describe the effects of circumstance on character. Under the rubric "circumstance" you may consider elements such as education, family, economic and social status, wartime conditions, and geographic isolation.
5. Write a brief story about an important decision you have made (e.g., picking a school, beginning or leaving a job, declaring a major, or ending a friendship). Show how your own qualities of character (to the extent that you understand them), together with your own experiences, have gone into the decision. You may write more comfortably if you give yourself another name and describe your actions in the third person.
6. Topics for paragraphs or short essays:
   a. What characteristics of the speaker are brought out by Amy Lowell in "Patterns"? Should the classifications "round" and "flat" even apply to her? Why or why not?
   b. Why does the speaker of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" philosophize about the darkness and the pounding surf nearby? What qualities of character do his thoughts reveal?
   c. Consider this proposition: To friends who haven't seen us for a time, we are round, but to ourselves and most other people, we are flat.
7. Using the card catalogue or computer catalogue in your library, find two critical studies of Nathaniel Hawthorne published by university presses. How fully do these studies describe and explain Hawthorne's depictions of character? Referring to these studies, write a short research-based essay on selected characters in Hawthorne's fiction.