

All good things must come to an end

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The amazing thing about literature is that it can be interrupted differently by each person who reads it. Which means that while one piece of writing is amazing, creative, and witty to one person to another person it could be the most boring, uninteresting, and redundant piece of literature they have ever read. In this semester of Literature 221, I was given the opportunity to read works from many different genres, time periods, and styles of writing. Some of which, like Emily Dickinson's Life I and Life XLIII, Joyce Carol Oates' Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?, and Sherman Alexie's What You Pawn I Will Redeem I thoroughly enjoyed and learned from.

While others such as Ernest Hemingway's Big Two-Hearted River, Mark Twain's excerpt When The Buffalo Climbed a Tree from Roughing It, and the excerpt from Sula by Toni Morrison weren't exactly my cup of tea.

Emily Dickinson is a remarkable poet who often writes from a very emotional and self-examining perspective.

This is why I really enjoyed the two selections of her work we had to read this semester. In her first poem Life I, the very first two lines make you stop and think, " I'M nobody! Who are you? Are you nobody, too?" (Dickinson 2) Bam! I was hit in the face with self-reflection. Am I somebody? Or am I a nobody? Emily Dickinson continues by saying " how dreary to be somebody!" (Dickinson2) as if to be somebody is a bad thing. I love that Emily Dickinson questions the ideology of having to be surrounded by people and having to constantly be in a spotlight. Every move that you make is questioned and examined by people.

Instead of being able to live for yourself and for your own happiness you are forced to live by the way society sees you. It made me see that maybe it truly is better to be a happy, content nobody. In her poem Life XLIII, Dickinson again made me pause and self-reflect but this time on the beauty of the human mind and its capabilities. In this poem she states that the brain is “wider than the sky”, “deeper than the sea”, and “is just the weight of God” (Dickinson 3). The sky, the sea, and God. Three powerful, endless, and even omnipotent to the human eye and yet the brain is more than that because it has the capability to imagine all of it. You can hold images of God, the sea, and God all in your mind. Dickinson wrote these poems with such beautiful imagery that really does make a reader stop and think. This is why her works are among my favorite reads from this semester.

Joyce Carol Oates brought a real life serial killer to life in her tale *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* Based off the actual murders of Charles Howard Schmid Jr., Oates tells the story of Arnold Friend and a young girl named Connie and the events that would eventually lead up to Connie's murder. I loved this tale because Oates gave a real voice to the real life victims of Schmid. While an article by the Daily News stated that, “Despite his creepiness, ladies loved Smitty” (citation here news article) in Oates' tale it was made evident that Connie wanted nothing to do with Friend and instead she tried to call the cops and even told him to “Get the hell out of here!” (Oates 340) When I read a tragic news article I will feel sorrow for the victim and their families for a moment and then go on with my life and forget about them.

Yet when I read a piece of work that captures my soul and really moves me to feel emotionally about a character as if they were a real person, I can recall them for years afterwards. Oates' made me feel for Connie because she gave her a background of a beautiful girl with a mother who disapproved of all she did and constantly compared her to her more homely sister, June. "Why don't you keep your room clean like your sister? How've you got your hair? xed—what the hell stinks? Hair spray? You don't see your sister using that junk." (Oates 333) A girl that may have been desperate for love and attention. Suddenly, in my mind, Oates' has not only weaved a haunting tale of young, naive girl who made mistakes and talked to the wrong stranger on the wrong day but she also made me feel for the real life victims of Schmid. Suddenly they became more than just names on a page and their names, Alleen Rowe, Gretchen and Wendy Fritz, will forever be in my mind and probably countless others who have read her work and know who it was based on. While Oates' is a talented writer and her words were beautifully written the reason her piece stands out as one of my favorites of this semester were for the deeper meaning and the legacy she left for the victims of a cruel, sick, twisted man.

A reader cannot help but root for a character who has redeemable qualities despite whatever odd, crude, or socially unacceptable behavior they may exhibit. Such is the case in my final favorite piece of writing from this semester, Sherman Alexie's *What You Pawn I Will Redeem*. In this tale of a homeless, alcoholic, money floundering Spokane, Washington Native American Indian named Jackson Jackson, a reader cannot help but fall in love with his spirit of never-ending generosity and unbreakable ties with tradition

and family. Alexie's particular style of writing gave light to Jackson's seemingly uncaring, lazy, and unapologetically unmotivated he attitude in a way that a reader cannot help but find just a little bit comical. It is written in first person from the rambling mind of Jackson and lines such as " Piece by piece, I disappeared. And I've been disappearing ever since. But I'm not going to tell you any more about my brain or my soul" (citation here page 401) made me laugh out loud at the standoffish behavior of this character. Jackson was unable to maintain a job, any of his marriages, or his relationships with his children. In fact, the only thing he did seem capable of maintaining was a constant drunken stupor throughout the entire tale.

Yet when he came upon his Grandmother's stolen regalia at a local pawn shop he was determined to find a way to raise the \$999 needed to rebuy this long lost family heirloom and return it to its rightful place. Each time he managed to earn or was gifted money for his mission he could not help but immediately spend it. However he was never selfish with his spending. He made sure that whatever he was given he shared with his fellow Indian. Never even coming close to making the necessary money to buy it make but still I found myself cheering him on. Because of his generosity, I was rooting for him to find a way to purchase back that precious connection to his family. And in the end, despite never actually managing to acquire the necessary cash, the pawn owner returned the regalia to Jackson, and I inwardly rejoicing in his success. And Alexie captured the moral for me in this thought, " Do you know how many good men live in this world? Too many to count!" (Alexie 415) Alexie challenged the stereotypes of a good person because he showed that even a drunken person who is unsuccessful in

every societal standard can be a good person because he is a kind, generous soul. This is the reason why this is another of my favorites from this semester's readings.

When thinking of a literary legend a name like Ernest Hemingway often comes to mind, yet in this semester's reading of *Big Two-Hearted River*, Mr. Hemingway missed the mark for me. While I appreciate the concept of a post-war soldier suffering from PTSD, I had a hard time really getting into this piece. Hemingway's commonly used iceberg principle style of writing was apparent in this piece with its overall lack of a substantial plot and its seemingly never-ending descriptions of just about everything. It is just not a style that appealed to me as a reader. I found it boring and extremely long. The symbolism was often obscured by the unnecessary descriptions of the surrounding scenery. "On the left, where the meadow ended and the woods began, a great elm tree was uprooted. Gone over in a storm, it lay back into the woods, its roots clotted with dirt, grass growing in them, rising a solid bank beside the stream. The river cut to the edge of the uprooted tree." (Hemingway 262) It just seemed excessive and unneeded to me.

While this is definitely one of my least favorite of this semester's readings, I have to say that Hemingway was a beautiful wordsmith who could make you feel as though you were part of the story. In this sentence, "He sat on the logs, smoking, drying in the sun, the sun warm on his back, the river shallow ahead entering the woods, curving into the woods, shallows, light glittering, big water-smooth rocks, cedars along the bank and white birches, the logs warm in the sun, smooth to sit on, without bark, gray to the touch; slowly the feeling of disappointment left him" (Hemingway 262) you can practically feel

the heat of the sun on your back and the relief that Nick feels as if a burden was lifted from your own chest. This story had some beautiful imagery overall though it was just not a tale I enjoyed reading.

Mark Twain is an inspirational writer with amazing talent and has written some remarkable classics. However, the excerpt from *Roughing It When the Buffalo Climbed a Tree*, will not be joining my list of his beloved masterpieces. Instead I found this fictional account tedious to read and found myself drifting off to sleep while at the same time trying to understand the particular vernacular used in this piece. The narrator of the majority of this tale was a character named Bemis whose style of speech was rambling and over-the-top. For example, “ Well, I was first out on his neck – the horse’s, not the bull’s—and then underneath, and next on his rump, and sometimes head up, and sometimes heels—but I tell you it seemed solemn and awful to be ripping and tearing and carrying on so in the presence of death, as you might say.” (Twain 16)

I can just imagine Bemis being this rambling, fool telling this ridiculous story with no ending in sight. It was just exhausting and mindless drivel that did not succeed in making me think about anything substantial or self-reflect which are qualities I rather enjoy when reading. I understand that according to Mark Twain, “ to string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they absurdities, is the basis of American art...” (Twain 13) and he accomplished that task beautifully. Nevertheless, it is just not a style that appealed to me and I struggled to enjoy reading this story.

This semester was my first time reading any of Toni Morrison's works. The excerpt from *Sula* was all of over the map for me. I had a hard time deciphering any real plot. It started off with two 12 years old girls walking through town and getting objectified by the men in the town. And if it wasn't bad enough that two young girls were being gawked at by grown men, the girls actually seemed to enjoy it. " So, when he said " pig meat" as Nel and Sula passed, they guarded their eyes lest someone see their delight." (Morrison 346) That line made my skin crawl with utter disgust. Then suddenly the girls are playing near a lake when a young boy named Chicken Little ends up drowning before their very eyes and their only reaction was " Nel spoke ? rst. ' Somebody saw.'" (Morrison 351) I had a hard time reading a story about such loss of innocence at such a young age. Morrison's writing was beautiful and captivating. The only reason this makes my least favorites list from this semester was I just genuinely felt sick the entire I was reading it. Completely horrified by these young girls lives and saddened by the fact that many girls' lives of this time period were like this.

This semester of Literature 221 was full of amazing pieces of writing. Tales that completely delighted, inspired, and captured my heart like those from Emily Dickinson, Joyce Carol Oates, and Sherman Alexie. As well as others who, for me, just did none of those things such as those from Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, and Toni Morrison. Overall I really enjoyed this class. I felt as though most of the forums gave me the opportunity to share my thoughts on each piece as well as opened my eyes to different perspectives. If I could give any constructive criticism it would be that sometimes I felt as if I could not quite meet expectations in the essay

requirements because I felt as though they were not clearly stated. Other than that, I thoroughly enjoyed this class and I feel as though I learned a lot. It definitely has made me look forward to taking other literature classes in the future.

Works Cited

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