HOW TO READ ASSIGNMENTS FOR ENGLISH CLASSES

Learning to Interpret Fiction and Poetry

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READING, UNDERSTANDING, AND INTERPRETING POETRY

An Overview

Although the conventions for novels and short stories and other short writings that have characters and a narrative plot at the forefront, poetry seldom employs the use of a plot, much less a set of characters to advance a controlling idea through stages of progressive complications, crisis, climax and resolution. Consequently, many readers struggle to understand the meaning and purpose of poetry – and abandon all efforts when it comes to interpreting the poet’s designed intent. Trying to comprehend what appears incomprehensible requires discipline – a willingness to seek meaning through a variety of interpretive “tools” and filters.

Therefore, the most important step in the process of understanding poetry requires the reader to understand the “gist” of poem – what it appears to happen or transpire on the surface level. This is the “text” of the poem. So, even while there may be a lack of plot events or characters, there remain ideas and images expressed through specific words that create an impression. Furthermore, much as someone might recognize a photo or a painting as having a location or setting, a poem has a “landscape” against which ideas play out.

These ideas, whether real or symbolic, find their expression in words – specific words – that convey something from the writer to the reader, from the speaker to the listener, and from the presenter to the viewer. Consequently, poems rarely exist solely on the level of the “text” – but rather they express “hidden” meanings about some aspect of human existence. After all, (as far as anyone knows) animals do not craft poetry. Bees don’t buzz ballads, seals don’t sing sonnets, and hippopotamuses don’t hail one another with haikus. Only humans use poetry and therefore the effort to use verse and meter and imagery and other rhetorical devices presumes that there is a deeper purpose for poetry.

Critics and academicians often refer to this as the rule of “significance.” In other words, stories and poetry prove to be more than what they appear to be – instead, there is a deeper meaning, something designated as the “subtext” or what the poem truly addresses.

Moreover, there can also be yet another obstacle for the reader who first engages in seeking meaning and that is a “supertext” or the actual use of literary devices to attract and steer a reader in a particular direction. The “supertext” represents the diction (choice of words), syntax (the ordering of words and phrases), meter, rhyme scheme and a host of other conventions. For the beginner, the “supertext” can be the type of diversion that complicates and confuses the pursuit of meaning so the reading abandons the search for the subtext.

To prevent this, students of poetry are often advised to read a poem at least three times: the first time for obvious discernible details, the second time to recognize the writer’s craft in the use or and purpose of poetic and rhetorical devices, and a third reading helps to discern the author’s purpose through “subtext.”
Accordingly, **whenever one first reads a short story or poem**, the first principle requires concentrating on the words as “surface” facts. In fact, as one reads, one ought to involve more than vision. One should escalate to the form of “active” reading and take notes on the verses.

The goal ought to be to write down summations or distillations that will serve to force the reader into the beginning stage of interpretation – figuring out the “gist” of the short story or poem – what it appears to be about and what the form and type of poetic expression it represents.

While short stories may vary in length, they basically fall into a fairly predictable narrative pattern that varies with point-of-view presentation, tense, and of course, figurative language conventions. Likewise, there are all sorts of poems – ranging from the most formally-structured (haikus) to lyric ballads to limericks to epics to sonnets, etc. The reader must become familiar with not only the type or genre of poetry (and the conventions of that type of poem – what distinguishes that type from another.)

Just as in citing information from an external source, there are different ways of annotating a poem as it is read. The chief two ways for helping discern what a poem means on the surface are the techniques of **paraphrasing** and **summarizing**.

**Paraphrasing** requires the reader to put the ideas derived from reading the poem into one’s own words. Quite simply, this involves writing down the “facts” as perceived on the surface. If the poem invokes allusions of nature or descriptions of trees, one simply jots down a few words that reflect those “facts.”

**Summarizing** requires more critical thought. It not only considers the “facts” of the poem, but takes it the analysis one step further and distills the most important aspects of each line and then makes a conclusive judgment regarding the use of particular words or the sequence in which they are written.

**While paraphrasing or summarizing help establish the “text’ of the poem, they also begin the process of interpretation.** They provide a starting point – because if the reader cannot discern what the poem conveys on the surface, there is little hope for understanding the true meaning (or subtext) underneath.

**THE SECOND TIME READING** through a poem or short story, one should concentrate on the diction, syntax, imagery, symbolism, atmosphere, figurative language, melodic devices, and rhyme scheme. While the emphasis during the first reading is on **what happens**, the emphasis during the second reading should be directed at **how and in what manner** the writer expresses what happens.

Again, the reader should take notes and observe **how** the language works to establish setting, mood, expectations, anticipation, and other rhetorical considerations.
Finally, **THE THIRD TIME READING** through the poem or short story, one should attempt to discern why the poem was written – to the degree that the poet understood the audience, the subject, the poetic and rhetorical devices that could be applied, and made creative and critical choices to achieve a particular end.

During this third reading, one should continue to make annotations and observations postulating the value(s) at stake in the poem, the goal or objective of the poet, and whether or not the creative/craft decisions succeeded in achieving that goal or objective. Finally, after the third read, one must attempt to “interpret” that subtext – the reality and validity of the message the poet endeavored to achieve. After arriving at an interpretation – that can be supported with coherent, logical, and reasonable evidences – one must seek to make an evaluation of the poem.

Evaluations always mean judgments. However, **evaluations** – much like interpretations, arguments, and claims – are always speculative and therefore require supports and substantiating evidence to be valid. This, then, forms the basis of the critical analysis essay. It is always a judgment, claim, or argument that must be developed systematically, coherently, logically, and substantiated with specific, verifiably-objective evidence.

Making a critical analysis of any story or poem will prove difficult unless one understands the requirements and application of literary terms and definitions. So the following explanation of interpretative reference terms for analyzing stories and poetry should prove helpful.

**STORY CONVENTIONS** – These are the filters or the considerations through which a writer uses (and a reader must discern in order to interpret when reading) that express the details of the story as well as the means for conveying (and sometimes smuggling) ideas to the readers and/or viewers.

- **Story Genre** – the group of category of identifiable conventions such as icons, motifs, characters, plots, etc. that link one story to another
- **Storytelling Pattern** – the structure and process of how a story unravels
- **Setting** – the location, the time period (era), the social, economic, educational and political status of characters in the story
- **Characters** – the simple and complex major and minor (protagonists, antagonists, and contagonists), ancillary characters, etc.
- **Language** – Literal and Figurative expressed through Diction and Syntax
- **Figures of Speech** – irony, symbols, allusion, metaphor, simile, analogy, allegory
- **Meaning** – Explicit and Implicit (implied and inferred)
- **Controlling Ideas** – idealistic, realistic, and ironic (values at stake in the story or poem)
- **Conflict** – inner, interpersonal and extrapersonal

*NOTE: The terms defined below illustrative power to poetry and communicate on the subtextual level a deeper meaning than might be evident on the surface.*
Indeed, imagery techniques focus one’s sensory perceptions onto and into a poem through language, helping words convey images, sounds, sensations.

**IMAGERY** – when the language provides a representation of a sensory experience

- **Visual imagery** - something described through sight, appears most commonly in poetry.
- **Auditory imagery** - representation of a sound
- **Olfactory imagery** - representation of a smell
- **Gustatory imagery** - representation of a taste
- **Tactile imagery** - touch: hardness, softness, wetness, heat, cold
- **Organic imagery** - internal sensation, hunger, thirst, fatigue, nausea
- **Kinesthetic imagery** - movement, physical tension

**NOTE**: Representing subjects through symbolic references can lend mystique to poetry, by including figurative language a deeper level of interpretation is necessary to fully grasp the theme.

**FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**- when the language employs “figures of speech” (Instances were analogous relations are implied – and where meaning cannot be derived literally – i.e. “I was so hungry I could eat a horse.”)

- **Metaphor** - describing something as something else
- **Simile** - metaphor using like or as
- **Personification** - giving human qualities to an object
- **Synecdoche** - using a part of something to describe a whole
- **Metonomy** - choose something related to an idea to represent the idea as a whole (e.g. “We have always remained loyal to the crown.” "He is a man of the cloth" “He loves the bottle.”)
- **Hyperbole** – exaggeration, to emphasize by overstating
- **Litotes** - form of understatement by asserting the positive by negating the negative (Example: This is no small problem)
- **Antithesis** - juxtaposes opposite ideas, heightens parallelism
- **Apostrophe** - addresses subject of poet
- **Symbol** - object standing for a concept, idea or emotion
- **Allusion** - reference to another story or character, lending deeper understanding
- **Common allusions**: Biblical, historical, literary
- **Connotation** – symbolic/emotional interpretations/associations of a word or phrase
- **Denotation** – the dictionary definition
MELODIC DEVICES – when the language provide rhythmic, metered patterns to poetry, So, incorporating melodic devices helps provide poetry a desired tone, and with appropriate word selection, a line or phrase not only communicates meaning, but does so in a memorable fashion.

- **Assonance** - repetition of vowel sounds within words
- **Alliteration** - first letter repetition
- **Consonance** - repeated consonant sound within words
- **Onomatopoeia** - sound words, Example: BAM! SPLAT! hiss... WHAM! CRASH!
- **Cacophony** - harsh, guttural “d” “t” “k”’s
- **Euphony** - hushed, pleasing “m” “l” “s”’s

RHYMING SCHEME – when the language exploits a similarity or matching sound between two words

- **End rhyme** - occurring at the end of two or more lines of verse
- **Internal rhyme** - occurs between two or more words in the same line of verse
- **Masculine rhyme** - one syllable rhymes with one syllable of another word e.g. light, bright
- **Feminine rhyme** - occurs when the last two syllables of a word rhyme with another e.g.: lighting, fighting
- **Triple rhyme** - last three syllables rhyme ex: victorious, glorious
- **Rhyme Scheme** - pattern or sequence in which rhyme occurs (a, b, a, b)
“INTERPRETING” SHORT FICTION

The Fable

A fable is a succinct fictional story, in prose or verse, that features animals, mythical creatures, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities such as verbal communication), and that illustrates or leads to an interpretation of a moral lesson (a "moral"), which may at the end be added explicitly in a concise expression of human wisdom.

A fable differs from other forms of short fiction, such as the parable that exclude characters who are anthropomorphized animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as actors that assume speech and other powers of humankind.

Aesop, born a Greek housel slave who eventually earned his freedom and became well-known for his wit and wisdom, authored (in theoral tradition) a number of fables to impart knowledge to children. His fables always contained a special lesson that was “smuggled” into the tale.

Some examples:

The Ants and the Grasshopper

The Ants were spending a fine winter’s day drying grain collected in the summertime. A Grasshopper, perishing with famine, passed by and earnestly begged for a little food. The Ants inquired of him, "Why did you not treasure up food during the summer?" He replied, "I had not leisure enough. I passed the days in singing." They then said in derision: "If you were foolish enough to sing all the summer, you must dance with supper in the winter."

The "smuggled message or moral: It is thrifty to prepare today for the wants of tomorrow.

The Ass in the Lion's Skin

An Ass, having put on the Lion's skin, roamed about in the forest and amused himself by frightening all the foolish animals he met in his wanderings. At last coming upon a Fox, he tried to frighten him also, but the Fox no sooner heard the sound of his voice than he exclaimed, "I might possibly have been frightened myself, if I had not heard your bray."

Moral: Clothes may disguise a fool, but his words will give him away.
The Birds, the Beasts, and the Bat

The Birds waged war with the Beasts, and each were by turns the conquerors. A Bat, fearing the uncertain issues of the fight, always fought on the side which he felt was the strongest. When peace was proclaimed, his deceitful conduct was apparent to both combatants. Therefore being condemned by each for his treachery, he was driven forth from the light of day, and henceforth concealed himself in dark hiding-places, flying always alone and at night.

Moral: *He winds up friendless who plays both sides against the middle*

The Dancing Monkeys

A prince had some Monkeys trained to dance. Being naturally great mimics of men's actions, they showed themselves most apt pupils, and when arrayed in their rich clothes and masks, they danced as well as any of the courtiers. The spectacle was often repeated with great applause, till on one occasion a courtier, bent on mischief, took from his pocket a handful of nuts and threw them upon the stage. The Monkeys at the sight of the nuts forgot their dancing and became (as indeed they were) Monkeys instead of actors. Pulling off their masks and tearing their robes, they fought with one another for the nuts. The dancing spectacle thus came to an end amidst the laughter and ridicule of the audience.

Moral: *Not everything you see is what it appears to be.*

The Fox and the Grapes

One hot summer's day a Fox was strolling through an orchard till he came to a bunch of Grapes just ripening on a vine which had been trained over a lofty branch. "Just the thing to quench my thirst," quote he. Drawing back a few paces, he took a run and a jump, and just missed the bunch. Turning round again, he jumped up, but with no greater success. Again and again he tried after the tempting morsel, but at last had to give it up, and walked away with his nose in the air, saying: "I am sure they are sour."

Moral: *It is easy to despise what you cannot get.*

The Fox and the Lion

When first the Fox saw the Lion he was terribly frightened, and ran away and hid in the wood. Next time however he came near the King of Beasts he stopped at a safe distance and watched him pass by. The third time they came near one another the Fox went straight up to the Lion and passed the time of day with him, asking him how his family were, and when he should have the pleasure of seeing him again; then turning his tail, he parted from the Lion without much ceremony.

Moral: *Familiarity breeds contempt.*
"INTERPRETING" PARABLES

A parable is also a succinct story, in prose or verse, which illustrates one or more instructive principles, or lessons, or (sometimes) a normative principle. It differs from a fable in that fables use animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters. It is a type of an analogy.

A parable is a short tale that illustrates universal truth, one of the simplest of narratives. It sketches a setting, describes an action, and shows the results. It often involves a character facing a moral dilemma, or making a questionable decision and then suffering the consequences. Though the meaning of a parable is often not explicitly stated, the meaning is not usually intended be hidden or secret but on the contrary quite straightforward and obvious.

The defining characteristic of the parable is the presence of a prescriptive subtext suggesting how a person should behave or believe. Aside from providing guidance and suggestions for proper action in life, parables frequently use metaphorical language which allows people to more easily discuss difficult or complex ideas. Parables teach an abstract argument, using a concrete narrative which is more easily grasped.

Examples:

The Obstacle in the Path

In ancient times, a King had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the king for not keeping the roads clear, but none did anything about getting the stone out of the way. Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. Upon approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. After the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the king indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The peasant learned what many of us never understand. Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.

Looking at the Rich Man

One day a wealthy father took his son on a trip to the country so that the son could see how the poor lived. They spent a day and a night at the farm of a very poor family. When they got back from their trip, the father asked his son, "How was the trip?"
"Very good, Dad!" the boy answered.
"Did you see how poor people can be?" his father asked.
"Yeah!" his son said.
"And what did you learn?" the man asked.
The son nodded, then answered, "I saw that we have a dog at home, and they have
four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of the garden; they have a creek that
has no end. We have imported lamps in the house; they have the stars. Our patio
reaches to the front yard; they have the whole horizon."
When the little boy was finished, the father was speechless.
His son then added, "Thanks Dad for showing me how poor we are!"

The Brick

A young and successful executive was traveling down a neighborhood street, going a
bit too fast in his new Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked
cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something.

As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag's side
door! He slammed on the brakes and backed the Jag back to the spot where the brick
had been thrown.

The angry driver then jumped out of the car, grabbed the nearest kid and pushed him
up against a parked car shouting, "What was that all about and who are you? Just what
the heck are you doing? That's a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot
of money. Why did you do it?"

The young boy was apologetic.

"Please, mister ... please! I'm sorry but I didn't know what else to do," he pleaded. "I
threw the brick because no one else would stop!"

With tears dripping down his face and off his chin, the youth pointed to a spot just
around a parked car.

"It's my brother," he said. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't
lift him up."

Now sobbing, the boy asked the stunned executive, "Would you please help me get him
back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me."

Moved beyond words, the driver tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat.
He hurriedly lifted the handicapped boy back into the wheelchair, then took out a linen
handkerchief and dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look told him
everything was going to be okay.

"Thank you and may God bless you," the grateful child told the stranger.

Too disturbed to speak, the man simply watched the boy push his wheelchair-bound
brother down the sidewalk toward their home.
It was a long, slow walk back to the Jaguar. The damage was very noticeable, but the driver never bothered to repair the dented side door.

He kept the dent there to remind him of this message, "Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention!"

The Parable of the Sower – an example of Jesus Christ’s usage

Mark 4:1-20 ESV

4:1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

9 And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven." 13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."
THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON – an example of Jesus Christ’s usage


11 Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”
INTERPRETING POETRY

My River
by Emily Dickinson
My river runs to thee.
Blue sea, wilt thou welcome me?
My river awaits reply.
Oh! Sea, look graciously.
I’lI’ll fetch thee brooks
From spotted nooks.
Say, sea,
Take me!

The Road Not Taken
by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
Approach of Winter
by William Carlos Williams

The half-stripped trees
struck by a wind together,
bending all,
the leaves flutter drily
and refuse to let go
or driven like hail
stream bitterly out to one side
and fall
where the salvias, hard carmine,—
like no leaf that ever was—
edge the bare garden.

ULYSES
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
that loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vexed the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known---cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honored of them all---
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end.
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, my own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the scepter and the isle---
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and through soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centered in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me---
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads---you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends.
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
the sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be that we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are---
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.