**Homecoming**

*1 "Going home,*" *she said.*

*"Graithnock.*" *she said.*

*"London,*" *she said.*

*"Frances Ritchie.*" *she said.*

*5 She treated his questions like spaces in an official form, impersonally, never digressing into humanising irrelevance. I am a stranger on a train, she was saying. She asked him nothing in return.*

*But the man was persistent. He had come on at Dumfries, entering a coach clogged with the boredom of several hours' travel, the unfinished crosswords, the*

10 *empty whisky miniatures interred in their plastic cups, the crumpled beer cans rattling minutely to the motion of the train. Picking his way among the preoccupied stares and the occasionally stretched legs, he had sat down opposite Fran. The seats had only just been vacated by a mother and a small girl who had made Fran wonder if her own desire for children was as deep as she told herself it was.*

15 *His persistence wasn't offensive. It had none of the I-secretly-know-what-xou-want-and-need machismo which Fran had learned to recognise from a distance like a waving flag and which caused her to shoot on sight. His persistence was gentle, slightly vulnerable, as if he had decided -for no reason that she could understand - that he wanted to please her. Although it was a smoker, he asked if*

*20 she minded him smoking.*

*"Just thought I'd check,*" *he said. "The way it's going these days, they'll be issuing a leper's bell with every packet."*

*Her smile disappeared like a mistake being erased.*

*"So what took you from Graithnock to London?"*

*25 She looked out of the window. Would she have known that countryside was Scotland if the stations they passed through hadn't told her?*

*"The train," she said. "The 12.10 I think it was. "*

*The sharpness of her remark made her glance towards his silence. He was smiling.*

*30 "You gave some extra information there," he said. "Does that mean you're softening towards me?"*

*"I wouldn't bet on it," she said.*

*But she was laughing. She noticed he had a smile as open as a blank cheque. In spite of herself, she fell the moment put down roots and blossom into one of*

*35 those sudden intimacies between strangers. He discovered that she was a journalist. He claimed to have seen her byline. ("That's what you call it? Isn 't it? A byline?") He convinced her by getting the newspaper right. He was a Further Education lecturer in English at Jordanhill College in Glasgow. He had been on a visit to students in Dumfries.*

*40 "I prefer taking the train when I can.*" *he said.* " *You go by car, it 'sjust a chore, isn 't it? This way, you can turn it into a carnival. Watch. Just answer one question, that's all we need. What do you drink ?*"

*He came back from the buffet with two gins and two cans of tonic for her, two whiskies and a plastic cupful of water for himself. They made a party between*

*45 them. As with all good parlies, the conversation went into overdrive.*

*"The new Glasgow?" he said. "Looks like backdoor Thatcherism to me. What difference is it making to the people in the housing-schemes? How many investors invest for the good of others? That kind of investment's the Trojan Horse, isn't it? Oh. look, these nice punters are giving us a prezzy. Let's bring it into the city.*

*50 Then, when it's dark, its belly opens and they all come out to loot and pillage."*

*"I think maybe* Manhattan," *she said. "But it's not exactly an easy choice. I still love* Play it again, Sam, *that scene where the hairdrier almost blows him away. I just think he's great. Who was it said that? Bette Midler? You want to take him home and burp him."*

*55 "Maybe 1 just haven't found the man," she said. "You volunteering? I"m involved at the moment, actually. But I don't think marriage is exactly imminent."*

*"It's interesting enough," she said. "But you go to a lot of places without really seeing them. Because you're therefor one purpose. It can be like travelling in a tunnel."*

*60 "Oh, that was the worst time," he said. "Don't worry about it. Divorce ? I can see what Dr Crippen was getting at. I'm not saying I agree with him. But murder must be a lot less hassle. "*

*Before the buffet closed ("Haven't we been lucky ?" he said. "They usually shut it about Carlisle, but the fella in the buffet's drunk."), she went and fetched them*

*65 two more drinks. By the time they were drawing into Graithnock she had his telephone number (but he didn't have hers) and Fran was about to say goodbye to Tom.*

*Departure heightened their sense of closeness. He was helping her with her case and threatening to come with her since he felt it only right, considering how*

*70 far they were along the road to marriage, that he should meet her parents. Just before he opened the door for her, he kissed her on the cheek.*

*Then she was on the platform with her case beside her and he was leaning out, waving with mock drama, and she felt slightly dazed with alcohol and elation, as if she were taking part in a scene from a film in which she might be the heroine*

*75 and didn 't know what would happen next, and then she turned and saw her parents.*

*They were standing thirty yards away, waiting for her to notice them. They would be doing that* - *not for them the spontaneity of running towards her. Victor and Agnes Ritchie, informal as a letterhead. They stood slightly apart, her father with his clipped, grey military moustache, a general in the army of the genteel,*

*80 her mother with that expression some unknown experience had pickled on her face countless years ago. Fran wondered again how they had acquired their ability to turn joy to a dead thing at a touch and how they had managed to pass the gift on to her. Years of hopelessness they had taught her resurfaced in her at once. She suspected the value of the pleasure she had just had.*

85 *Her life in miniature, she thought, this journey. A promise something in her*

*wouldn't allow her to fulfil. She didn't think she would be phoning him. She hoped she would but, standing there, she would have bet against it. She felt her faith in life and living evaporate. Her parents had taught her well. Maybe home is simply where you can't get away from, she thought.*

90 *As she lifted her case and walked towards them, she fingered the return ticket*  *in the pocket of her jacket, wondering how far she would have to go finally to get*  *away from here.*

*William Me llvanney:* Walking Wounded.

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**GUIDELINES**

"The Story of an Hour" and "Pop Bottles" will be referred to in the following guidelines. Though context, characters and action differ when compared with "Homecoming", can you see why these references can be helpful in the analysis of William Me Ilvanney's story?

1. The most conspicuous feature of the story is its clear-cut **structure.** The train journey provides the traditional unities of place and action. The story comes to a close when the train reaches its destination, *Graithnock* as announced by Fran (2). Yet a homecoming may be more complex than just *going home* (1). Compare **the title and first line** with **the last sentence.** Are the usual associations of the words *home* and *homecoming* to be found in the story, particularly at the end? What kind of pattern do the beginning and the ending suggest?

Like "Pop Bottles" and "The Story of an Hour", "Homecoming" may be subdivided into three parts which also point out a parallel between space and **plot,** though unlike the first two stories, there is no crossing the street one way and the other or climbing up and down the stairs to mark out a deliberate change in the action. Draw up a list of the transformations taking place 1. 43-45 as compared with those 1. 63-67. What oppositions can you draw between the first and the third parts (for instance, regarding space, characters, action, speech or images)? Fran *soften(s) towards* Tom in the first part: what are the softening signals? Yet even before meeting her parents in the third part, she keeps herself to herself and holds out against him. What shows it?

2. **The referential function of space** is foregrounded in "Homecoming". Verisimilitude is created by precise space markers - names (Graithnock however only exists on paper), spatial propositions, verbs - as well as by references to cultural, political and everyday life in the eighties. Draw up a list of these referential markers.

Space also has a prominent **symbolic function** which is highlighted I. 85: *Her life in miniature, she thought, this journey.* Explain the relevance of this image generally speaking and in Fran's particular case. The following sentence: *A promise something in her wouldn 't allow her to fulfil* (85-86) suggests another association, with *the empty whisky miniatures interred in their plastic cups* (10). Draw up a list of the words connected with emptiness (vs fulness), distance or difference (vs closeness or similarity), death (vs life). Why can it be said that there may be a conscious - or unconscious - pun in the use of *apart* (78), *taking part (1 A)* followed by *the heroine* 's part in a film and *a party* (44)? Fran's *byline* may be another significant association: it refers to the line giving the writer's name in a magazine but it also evokes what is secondary or minor as for instance, in byway or byproduct. What relevance can such a meaning have to Fran's journey'.'

Space and spatial associations may reinforce a character's presentation too **(analogical function).** The train brings together at least two kinds of oppositions which may be said to encapsulate Fran's problem: dynamism vs statism (for the passengers in the compartments), and outdoors vs indoors (for the same passengers). Consider 1. 57-59 and how these oppositions delineate her contradictions, particularly the illusion that outer action may solve an inner deficiency. Why can it be said that the tunnel simile (59) sums up the two oppositions?

Analyse Fran's presentation at the beginning, her clipped answers, impersonal attitude (5-6) and suggested aggressiveness (17) and her parents' description (77-81) to point out the similarities between them. Find out other instances of the military metaphor. Could another metaphor or semantic field contrast with it (in part II)?

3. Examine the syntax of 1. 72-75 and its significance concerning the narrative's turning-point (note that Fran literally turns too?). To what extent can this **"revelation"** be compared with the epiphany in "The Story of an Hour"? Consider the lexis 1. 75 and the arrangement on the page as well as what is ""revealed" and its novelty. Compare Mrs Mallard's joint discovery of freedom and self and Fran's final feelings. How do the two characters relate to family, to marriage and to a social and religious education? As concerns relationships between men and women, what symbolic tokens of equality does Tom and Fran's brief meeting evince? *The road to marriage* (70) is part of Tom's mock-serious acting but the metaphor is also reminiscent of the journey of life. What conclusion would you draw from it?

There is no dramatic irony in "Homecoming" and Fran's point of view prevails. Yet the narrator is far from unobtrusive. Many of the similes and metaphors do not originate in Fran's mind but in the narrator's desire to explain her behaviour. Compare I. 74 and Tom's smile *as open as a blank cheque* (33) or her smile which disappeared *like a mistake being erased* (23). Consider the differences between the two characters last minutes together (63-75) and Fran's meeting with her parents (76-92) in terms of focalization and discourse. Would you say that one of these excerpts exemplifies the godlike - father-like? -function of the narrator?

**Legend for a Painting**

1 *A* *knight rode to a place where a lady was living with a dragon. She was a*

*gently bred creature with a high forehead, and her dress - allowing for her*

*surroundings - was neat. While the dragon slept, the knight had a chance to*

*present himself.*

5 "*I* *have come.* " *he told the lady, "to set you free.* " *He pointed at a stout chain*

*linking her to her monstrous companion. It had a greenish tinge, due the knight*

*supposed to some canker oozing from the creature's flesh.*

*Green was the dragon's colour. Its tail was green; so were its wings, with the*

*exception of the pale pink eyes which were embedded in them and which glowed*

10 *like water-lilies and expanded when the dragon flew, as eyes do on the spread*

*tails of peacocks. Greenest of all was the dragon's under-belly which swelled like*

*sod on afresh grave. It was heaving just now and emitting gurgles. The knight*

*shuddered.*

*"What, " the lady wondered, "do you mean by 'free' ?"*

15 *The knight spelled it: "F-R-E-E", although he was unsure whether or not she*

*might be literate. "To go!" he gasped for he was grappling with distress.*

*"But where?" the lady insisted. "I like it here, you know. Draggle arid I" - the*

*knight feared her grin might be mischievous or even mad — "have a perfect*

*symbiotic relationship!"*

20 *The knight guessed at obscenities.*

*"I clean his scales, " she said, " and he prepares my food. We have no cutlery*

*so he chews it while it cooks in the fire from his throat: a labour-saving device.*

*He can do rabbit stew, braised wood pigeon, even liver Venetian style when we*

*can get a liver. "*

25 *"God's blood!" the knight managed to swear. His breath had been taken away.*

*"I don't know that recipe. Is it good? I can see,* " *the ladv wisely soothed, "you*

*don't approve. But remember that fire scours. His mouth is germ free. Cleaner*

*than mine or your own, which, if I may say so with respect, has been breathing*

*too close. Have you perhaps been chewing wild garlic?"*

30 *The knight crossed himself. " You,* " *he told the lady, "must be losing your wits*

*as a result of living with this carnal beast!" He sprinkled her with a little sacred*

*dust from a pouch that he carried about his person. He had gathered it on the*

*grave of Saint George the Dragon Killer and trusted in its curative properties.*

*"God grant, " he prayed, "you don't lose your soul as well. Haven't you heard that*

35 *if a single drop of dragon's blood falls on the mildest man or maid, they grow as carnal*

*as the beast itself? Concupiscent!" he hissed persuasively. "Bloody! Fierce!"*

*The lady sighed. "Blood does obsess you!" she remarked. "Draggie never*

*bleeds. You needn 't worry. His skin's prime quality. Very resistant and I care for*

*him well. He may be 'carnal' as you say. We're certainly both carnivores. I take*

40 *it you 're a vegetarian ?* "

*The knight glanced at the cankered chain and groaned. "You're mad!" he ground his teeth. " Your sense of values has been perverted. The fact that you can* V *see it proves it!*"

*"A tautology. I think?" The lailv grinneil. "Why don't you have a talk with old*

45 *Draggie when he wakes up.' You'll see how gentle he can be. Thai might dispel your prejudices.* "

*But the knight had heard enough. He neither liked long words nor thought them proper in a woman's mouth.* Deeds not words *wax the motto emblazoned on his shield, for he liked words that condemned words and this, as the lady could have*

50 *told him. revealed inner contradictions likely to lead to trouble in the long run.*

*"Enough!" he veiled and, lifting his lance, plunged it several times between the dragon's scales. He had no difficulty in doing this, for the dragon was a slow-witted, somnolent beast at best and just now deep in a private dragon-dream. Its eyes, when they opened, were iridescent and flamed in the sunlight, turning,*

55 *when the creature wept, into great, concentric, rainbow wheels of fire. "Take that!" the knight was howling gleefully, "and that and that!"*

*Blood spurted, gushed, and spattered until his face, his polished armour and*

*the white coat of his charger were veined and flecked like porphyry. The dragon*

*was soon dead but the knight's rage seemed unstoppable. For minutes, as though*

60 *battening on its own release, it continued to discharge as he hacked at the*

*unresisting carcass. Butchering, his sword swirled and slammed. His teeth*

*gnashed. Saliva flowed in stringy beardlets from his chin and the lady stared at*

*him with horror. She had been pale before but now her cheeks seemed to have*

*gathered sour, greenish reflections into their brimming hollows.*

65 *Abruptly, she dropped the chain. Its clank, as it hit a stone, interrupted the*

*knight's frenzy. As though just awakened, he turned dull eyes to her. Questioning.*

*"Then, " slowly grasping what this meant, "you were never his prisoner, after*

*all?"*

*The lady pointed at a gold collar encircling the dragon's neck. It had been*

70 *concealed by an overlap of scales but had slipped into view during the fight. One end of the chain was fastened to it.*

*"He was mine," she said. "But as I told you he was gentle and more a pet than a prisoner. "*

*The knight wiped his eyelids which were fringed with red. He looked at his*

75 *hands.*

*"Blood!" he shrieked. "Dragon's blood!"*

*"Yes," she said in a cold, taut voice, "you're bloody. Concupiscent, no doubt? Fierce, certainly! Carnal?" She kicked the chain, which had broken when she threw it down and, bending, picked up a link that had become detached. "I'll wear*

80 *this, " she said bitterly, "in token of my servitude. I'm your prisoner now. " She slipped the gold, green-tinged metal ring on to the third finger of her left hand. It too was stained with blood.*

*Julia O'Faolain:* Daughters of Passion, *Penguin Hooks, 19X2 (pp. 9-11). "Legend for a Painting" first published in* Cosmopolitan *(USA), 1976.*

**GUIDELINES**

Like in "Homecoming", a relationship between a man and a woman and the attempt at dialogue which logically goes with it arc foregrounded in "Legend for a Painting". Both stories may be said to deal with a meeting and a misunderstanding, because of the woman's hopeless passivity or of the man's fanatic violence.

The treatment and tone of "Legend for a Painting", however, remind us of "The Werewolf". Again a well-known *legend* is used as the implicit though subverted pattern for the story and the reader's pleasure derives to a large extent from this titillating confrontation between the medieval legend and its modern counterpart.

1. First identify **the traditional elements** of **the legend** as concerns the three characters and the narrative development. The use of an elevated style is also relevant, cf. the inversions in § 3. The heroic dimension is suggested by some verbs and the poetic dimension by several similes.

Yet incongruous elements transform a serious, dignified story with a religious purpose (a parable) into a **parodic** imitation with clearly subversive accents. Draw up a list of these inconsistencies which include time (the Middle Ages vs labour-saving devices or germs), characters (underline the traits which do not agree with the conventional picture) and the narrative pattern which is definitely not St George's familiar programme. Determine what the lady's initial situation was and consequently what the final one undoubtedly is. Comparing the knight's and the lady's programmes and their outcomes, would you say that the story has an ironical ending?

2. Another similarity between "Legend for a Painting" and "The Werewolf is the variety of tones often designated by the catch-all term of humour. As in "The Werewolf, distinctions should be made between humour, irony and satire. In Julia O'Faolain's story, **humour** is used to deflate the myth, for example in the very first sentence the everyday situation of a woman living with - a dragon and in the third the knight presenting himself. Stylistic discrepancies also constitute a humorous device, the contrast between a familiar and a polished style for example. Give a few examples.

**Irony** plays on the double significance arising from the clash between two points of view, not only the knight's and the lady's but also the knight's and the narrator's. Compare 1. 5-6: *He pointed at a stout chain linking her to her monstrous companion* and 1. 69: *The lady pointed at a gold collar encircling the dragon's neck.* Note how his own reactions and the unfolding of the action belie the knight's words (cf. his use of *mad* to refer to the lady). What can the reader make of a Christian hero who seems to *awaken* after his fight with Evil and turns *dull eyes* (66) to the lady/princess whose checks *seemed to have gathered sour, greenish reflections into their brimming hollows?*

**Satire** goes further still as it openly derides and uses laughter as a weapon against a butt or target which may be an individual, a class, an institution or the whole race of man. How is the fight with the dragon presented? What does Christ's soldier look like? Does the dragon behave as expected? The narrator also inteiprets the knight's action and comments on it. What do these interventions amount to?

3. If the medieval legend is debunked and its hero belittled, another story - a modern legend? - with unconventional heroes is substituted for it. At the same time, **a subversive moral** is put forward.

What picture of the world before the knight's interference is suggested? You should take into account the poetic description of the dragon § 3, the symbol of its *gold collar* as well as the lady-dragon relationship.

Innocence vs sin and the profane vs the sacred (or knowing vs believing) constitute two important and congruent semantic fields in the story. Analyze the three characters" features, behaviour and speech to determine their almost allegorical meaning. What do you make of the dragon's tears (55), of the knight's obsession with the body (13, 20, 36), of the lady's interest in a personal relationship *(Draggle and I,* 17) and in the material world? What is the unconventional - and disturbing - conclusion of the age-old fight between Good and Evil. Reason and Fanaticism?

The last episode with the lady's ultimate gesture (80-82) may be interpreted as a kind of **moral** in action. Consider the ring, the conjunction of gold and green, the third finger of the left hand (the thumb does not count) and the bloodstain. The undoubtedly feminist standpoint is not the only interpretation which may be put forward. Remember the Irish origin of the writer. Whatever the interpretation, the semantic significance is the same.

4. "Legend for a Painting" is a sophisticated and complex **title.**

Apart from the substitution of a modern legend for a medieval one. which does not alter the meaning of the word legend (= story or tale), there is another way of understanding this word, i.e. an inscription or caption below a painting or map. How would this second meaning fit Julia O'Faolain's story?

The painting also may be read in two different ways:

• There is the almost certain reference to Paolo Ucccllo's painting at the National Gallery (London) entitled St George Freeing the Princess: the similarities are quite striking, particularly as concerns the pink eyes on the dragon's green wings, the leash or chain and the gentle, profanely dressed lady. To some extent O'Faolain's modern legend was "inspired" by this painting (or another representation of St George and the dragon or some kind of mental picture of it) as the painting itself was "inspired" by the medieval legend. It might also be said that her story constitutes a legend (second meaning) for Uccello's painting.

• The knight's shield described in the story (48-49) may be seen as a kind of painting too: Deeds not words *was the motto emblazoned on his shield.* How would you interpret this ironical *mise en abyme* of words in a story made of words?