

7 (OR MORE) HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE INTRODUCTIONS

The following are examples of effective introductions—the first from a professional journal in English Studies, and the next 4 from student papers on “Strange Fits.” Our challenge is to figure out how and why they work: what do they have in common? What do they do that we could abstract and use as a guideline or template for writing introductions of our own?

Reading these introductions, identify:

- a. What seems to be working about this introduction
- b. What the “job” of each sentence seems to be in the whole of the paragraph

ABSTRACT FROM A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

Racism and Homophobia in *The Merchant of Venice*

A close reading of *The Merchant of Venice* within the micropolitics of its immediate historical moment shows that the play originates as an antiracist response to the hanging of Rodrigo Lopez in 1594. By shadowing the representation of Shylock's Jewishness with the depiction of Antonio's paradoxical ethnic, sexual and religious identity as a "Machiavellian merchant," Shakespeare offers a critique of the essentializing operation that produces stereotypes. The symmetry between Antonio and Shylock reflects a repetitive historical process: The production of the irredeemably perverse "homosexual" was anticipated by the imposition of the concept of blood purity on early modern Jewish converts to Christianity.

STUDENT 1

Strange Fits of Passion

William Wordsworth's poem "Strange fits of passion I have known" is an account of the speaker's travel to the cottage of his lover, Lucy, one night. As he rides his horse down the path, he concentrates on the moon as it sinks through the sky, and when it drops out of his view, he suddenly wonders if Lucy has died. This is the "strange fit of passion" he warns us of in the first stanza (Wordsworth 1). It remains ambiguous throughout the poem what happened to Lucy. It can be interpreted that she did not die, and the "strange fit of passion" was indeed merely "fond and wayward" (lines 1; 25). Contrarily, it could be considered a tale of an omen which notified the speaker of her death, and the fit, or rather, forewarning, was indeed so "strange" that the speaker must "dare" to tell it (lines 1; 2). This pertinent ambiguity causes readers to wonder whether the poem suggests nature can give human beings signs. The strongest interpretation of the poem, supported by its time frame, suggests that it does not.

STUDENT 2

When Confronted With Time

William Wordsworth's "Strange fits of passion I have known" places a strong emphasis on time, and through this emphasis, gives a possible explanation for the narrator's "fit." The narrator recounts a journey to the cottage of his lover, Lucy. Over the course of this journey, his horse, the moon, and even a fleetingly mentioned June rose, mark the passage of time. The narrator does not recognize this when the journey takes place, and is affected by a great change when he does ultimately have the realization of time passing, after which he is struck with a "fit." Through this emphasis on the passage of time, "Strange fits" focus lies completely on the narrator, and his individual perspective, rather than on his larger connection with either his lover or Nature.

STUDENT 3

The Ambiguity and Clearness of "Passion": Romance and Romantic Morbidity in "Strange Fits of Passion I Have Known"

In crafting "Strange Fits of Passion I have Known," Wordsworth, perhaps intentionally, chooses words and phrases that are ambiguous in definition to describe the speaker's attitude towards the experience he relays in the poem. The plot of "Strange Fits" is clear: the speaker travels by horse to see Lucy, the woman he loves, watches the moon descend behind her house on the horizon, and suddenly feels overwhelmed by the thought that she could be dead. The ambiguity comes in the plot's introduction and conclusion, where Wordsworth's specific word choice reveals his speaker's feelings about the story he relays. The phrasing of the poem's title subject alone—the speaker's "strange fits of passion"—lends itself to multiple interpretations of definition. But the ambiguity of these words' definitions actually lends itself to clarity of meaning: not to multiple distinctive, valid interpretations of the speaker's feelings, but rather to a comprehensive understanding of their complexity. "Passion" is described as any strong or overpowering feeling or emotion. Although its most common usage implies romantic love, it may refer to desire, hate, fear or even excitement and agitation. The "passion" of the speaker is not either romantic passion or passionate fear, it is the strong feeling that manifests itself concurrently as both: the intense love he feels for Lucy and his intense fear of that love ending. In fact, his love and his fear are not diametrically opposed but rather inextricably linked. His simultaneous love for Lucy and awareness of the imminence and possibility of death necessitate his feelings of fear; his optimistic sense of romance, in the face of his knowledge of mortality, leads logically to a pessimistic romantic morbidity.

STUDENT 4

Seeking the Universal Soul in "Strange Fits of Passion"

In "Strange Fits of Passion", Wordsworth depicts a lover's reflection on a midnight journey undertaken to the cottage of his beloved, weaving through the speaker's memories reoccurring images of surrounding nature. Indeed, so attuned is the narrator to his concrete setting that the poem ambiguously appears to suggest that Lucy's persona is interchangeable with the personified entity of nature. Subsequently, the speaker's romantic relationship with Lucy is encompassed by the larger relationship he shares with nature as a whole. Wordsworth builds this case, first tying the reoccurring motif of the moon to Lucy's persona, and then conveying the notion that both the moon and Lucy are part of a larger nature infused with spirit. As such, the narrator's physical journey to Lucy's cottage represents his attempt to reach this entity of nature. In that light, "Strange Fits of Passion" ultimately illustrates the concept that nature contains living, all-encompassing spirit into which the petty passions of humans, here the lover's desire for Lucy, become merged into a universal consciousness and lover's "fits" are his fears of a soulless universe.