

Prologue

By way of a prologue, this study starts with two text excerpts (Figs. 1 and 2) and a thought experiment.

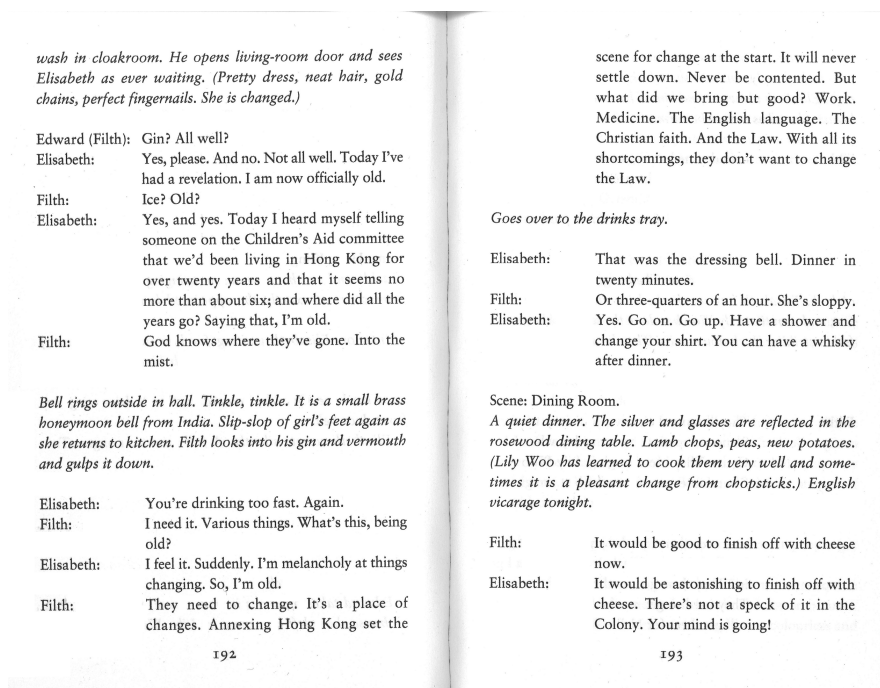


Fig. 1: Text excerpt one.

Having read both of the excerpts, you are invited to consider the following questions: Which one of the excerpts would you consider a narrative text? Which a dramatic one? Please stop reading and take a minute to think about this. When you have decided, read on.

To continue with the little thought experiment: Which of the text excerpts do you think is taken from a novel? Which one from a play? Once again, please stop reading to ponder these questions. When you have reached a decision, read on.

You might be startled to learn that text excerpt one (Fig. 1), which arguably appears dramatic, is taken from Jane Gardam's novel *The Man in the Wooden Hat* (2014 [2009]), while text excerpt two (Fig. 2), which is likely to be perceived as narrative, is taken from J. M. Barrie's play *What Every Woman Knows* (2008 [1908]). As drama and narrative have long been considered mutually exclusive,

James Wylie is about to make a move on the dambrod,^o and in the little Scotch room there is an awful silence befitting the occasion. James with his hand poised—for if he touches a piece he has to play it, Alick will see to that—raises his red head suddenly to read Alick's face. His father, who is Alick, is pretending to be in a panic lest James should make this move. James grins heartlessly, and his fingers are about to close on the 'man' when some instinct of self-preservation makes him peep once more. This time Alick is caught: the unholy ecstasy on his face tells as plain as porridge that he has been luring James to destruction. James glares; and, too late, his opponent is a simple old father again. James mops his head, sprawls in the manner most conducive to thought in the Wylie family, and, protruding his underlip, settles down to a reconsideration of the board. Alick blows out his cheeks, and a drop of water settles on the point of his nose.

You will find them thus any Saturday night (after family worship, which sends the servant to bed); and sometimes the pauses are so long that in the end they forget whose move it is.

It is not the room you would be shown into if you were calling socially on Miss Wylie. The drawing-room for you, and Miss Wylie in a coloured merino^o to receive you; very likely she would exclaim, 'This is a pleasant surprise!' though she has seen you coming up the avenue and has just had time to whip the dustcloths^o off the chairs, and to warn Alick, David and James, that they had better not dare come in to see you before they have put on a dicker.^o Nor is this the room in which you would dine in solemn grandeur if invited to drop in and take pot-luck, which is how the Wylies invite, it being a family weakness to pretend that they sit down in the dining-room daily. It is the real living-room of the house, where Alick, who will never get used to fashionable ways, can take off his collar and sit happily in his stocking-soles, and James at times would do so also; but catch Maggie letting him.

There is one very fine chair, but, heavens, not for sitting on; just to give the room a social standing in an emergency. It sneers at the other chairs with an air of insolent superiority, like a haughty bride who has married into the house for money. Otherwise the furniture is homely; most of it has come from that smaller house where the Wylies began. There is the large and shiny chair which can be turned

into a bed if you look the other way for a moment. James cannot sit on this chair without gradually sliding down it till he is lying luxuriously on the small of his back, his legs indicating, like the hands of a clock, that it is ten past twelve; a position in which Maggie shudders to see him receiving company.

The other chairs are horse-hair, than which nothing is more comfortable if there be a good slit down the seat. The seats are heavily dented, because all the Wylie family sit down with a dump.^o The draught-board is on the edge of a large centre table, which also displays four books placed at equal distances from each other, one of them a Bible, and another the family album. If these were the only books they would not justify Maggie in calling this chamber the library, her dogged name for it; while David and James call it the west-room and Alick calls it 'the room,' which is to him the natural name for any apartment without a bed in it. There is a bookcase of pitch pine, which contains six hundred books, with glass doors to prevent your getting at them.

No one does try to get at the books, for the Wylies are not a reading family. They like you to gasp when you see so much literature gathered together in one prison-house, but they gasp themselves at the thought that there are persons, chiefly clergymen, who, having finished one book, coolly begin another. Nevertheless it was not all vainglory that made David buy this library: it was rather a mighty respect for education, as something that he has missed. This same feeling makes him take in the *Contemporary Review*^o and stand up to it like a man. Alick, who also has a respect for education, tries to read the *Contemporary*, but becomes dispirited, and may be heard muttering over its pages, 'No, no use, no use, no,' and sometimes even 'Oh hell.' James has no respect for education; and Maggie is at present of an open mind.

They are Wylie and Sons of the local granite quarry, in which Alick was throughout his working days a mason. It is David who has raised them to this position; he climbed up himself step by step (and hewed the steps), and drew the others up after him. 'Wylie Brothers,' Alick would have had the firm called, but David said No, and James said No, and Maggie said No; first honour must be to their father; and Alick now likes it on the whole, though he often sighs at having to shave every day; and on some snell mornings^o he still creeps from his couch at four and even at two (thinking that his mallet and chisel are calling him), and begins to pull on his trousers, until the grandeur of them reminds him that he can go to bed again. Sometimes he cries a

Fig. 2: Text excerpt two.

the outcome of this thought experiment might come as a surprise to you. It has certainly taken me by surprise. Along with my infatuation with the theatre and my love of drama theory and narratology, it has become part of my motivation to investigate drama anew (under the auspices of transgeneric narratology) and to conceptualise dramatic storytelling, on the one hand, and narrative in drama, on the other, no longer as generic impossibilities but as literary historical and cultural historical facts – facts that need to be investigated, conceptualised, analysed, and interpreted. I have done so with this book. Reading it, may you continue to be – hopefully positively – surprised.