

DICTION AND VOCABULARY

1. Identify the simile Lahiri uses in Paragraph 5, and the metaphor she uses in Par. 6 (see Guide: *Figurative Language*). What larger meanings do they convey?
2. If you do not know the meaning of some of the following words, consult a dictionary: *shuttling* (Par. 1); *dal* (2); *cusp* (4); *steadfast* (6); *counterpoint*, *ascendancy* (7).

READ TO WRITE

1. **Collaborating:** Working in a group, create a list of terms that individual group members use to describe themselves, for example: brainiac, geek, Chinese American, athlete, conservative, under-achiever, troublemaker, sports fan. Survey group members about how they interpret this self-definition, using Lahiri's discussion of her own self-definition as a model. Write a brief report as a group summarizing the results of your survey.
2. **Considering Audience:** Do you think that the author wrote this essay primarily to Indian American readers? Do you think that other readers who do not define themselves as Indian Americans would relate well to the essay? Explain your answers.
3. **Developing an Essay:** How do you define yourself? Use a term to define some aspect of your personality, either a common one like those in question 1, or create a new term to define yourself. Using Lahiri's essay as a model, develop an extended definition of this side of you. Be sure to communicate to the reader why he or she should be interested in your self-definition.

(NOTE: Suggestions for topics requiring development by DEFINITION are on pp. 326-327 at the end of this chapter.)

ANNE FADIMAN

ANNE FADIMAN was born in New York City in 1953 and attended Harvard University, where she served as the undergraduate columnist for *Harvard Magazine*. She later wrote for both *Life* and *Civilizations*, and she has received two National Magazine Awards for Reporting and Essays. She also received the National Book Critics Circle Award for her 1997 book, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. Her other works include two collections of essays entitled *Ex-Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader* (1998) and *At Large and At Small: Familiar Essays* (2007). Fadiman currently serves as the Francis Chair in nonfiction writing at Yale University.

Coffee

Caffeine is perceived by many as a necessary crutch that is used to get us through early mornings, interminable hours at the office, and many of the other stressful situations that arise on a daily basis. In this essay, Anne Fadiman traces the transformation of coffee from the stigmatized ambrosia of the overworked to a kind of miracle drug that raised English society out of its drunken haze, inspired the feverishly brilliant writings of Balzac, fostered a public discourse that led to some of the great intellectual advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and personally enabled her to survive one of the greatest emotional challenges of her life.

When I was a sophomore in college, I drank coffee nearly every evening with my friends Peter and Alex. Even though the coffee was canned; even though the milk was stolen from the dining hall and refrigerated on the windowsill of my friends' dormitory room, where it was diluted by snow and adulterated by soot; even though Alex's scuzzy one-burner hot plate looked as if it might electrocute us at any moment; and even though we washed our *batterie de cuisine* in the bathroom sink and let it air-dry on a pile of paper towels next to the toilet—even though Dunster F-13 was, in short, not exactly Escoffier's kitchen, we considered our nightly coffee ritual the very acme and pitch of elegance. And I think that in many ways we were right.

Alex came from Cambridge, but Peter was alluringly international. He had a Serbian father, an American mother, and a French coffee-maker. At my home in Los Angeles, the coffee-making process had taken about three seconds: you plunked a spoonful of Taster's Choice freeze-dried crystals in a cup, added hot water, and stirred.

With Peter's *cafetière à piston*, you could easily squander a couple of hours on the business of assembling, heating, brewing, pouring, drinking, disassembling, and cleaning (not to mention talking), all the while telling yourself that you weren't really procrastinating, because as soon as you were fully caffeinated you would be able to study like a fiend. The *cafetière* had seven parts: a cylindrical glass beaker; a four-footed metal frame; a chrome lid impaled through its center by a plunger rod topped with a spherical black knob; and three metal filtration discs that screwed onto the tip of the plunger in a sequence for whose mastery our high SAT scores had somehow failed to equip us. After all the pieces were in place, you dolloped some ground coffee into the beaker, poured in boiling water, and waited precisely four minutes. (In the title sequence of *The Ipcress File*, special agent Harry Palmer unaccountably fails to carry out this crucial step. As an eagle-eyed critic for *The Guardian* once observed, Palmer grinds his beans and pops them into his *cafetière*, but *fails to let the grounds steep before he depresses the plunger*. How could any self-respecting spy face his daily docket of murder and mayhem fueled by such an anemic brew?) Only then did you apply the heel of your hand to the plunger knob and ram the grounds to the bottom of the beaker, though the potable portion always retained a subtle trace of Turkish sludge. What a satisfying operation! The plunger fit *exactly* into its glass tunnel, presenting a sensuous resistance when you urged it downward; if you pressed too fast, hot water and grounds would gush out the top. The whole process involved a good deal of screwing and unscrewing and trying not to make too much of a mess. Truth to tell, it was a lot like sex (another mystery into which I was initiated that year, though not by Peter or Alex), and as soon as you'd done it once, you wanted to do it again and again and again.

Disdaining the dining hall's white polystyrene cups, most of which had gone a little gray around the rim, each of us had procured our own china mug. Mine had a picture of a polka-dotted pig on it, an allusion to the frequency with which it was refilled. I stirred its contents with a silver demitasse spoon whose bowl was engraved with the name of my hometown. "Firenze" or "Cap d'Antibes" would have been preferable to "Los Angeles," but I did like the feel of the calligraphy against my tongue. Although the whole point of coffee-drinking was to be grown up—no Pepsi-Cola for bohemian intellectuals like *us*!—the amount of milk and sugar with which we undermined our sophisticated brew suggested that we needed to regress as much as we yearned to evolve. The end product resembled melted coffee ice cream.

3

It was the last time in my life that coffee slowed the hours rather than speeding them up. Those long, lazy nights—snow falling outside on Cowperthwaite Street, the three of us huddled inside in a warm, bright room, talking of literature and politics until the rest of Dunster House was asleep—were an essential part of my college curriculum. After all, wasn't education a matter of infusing one's life with flavorful essences, pressing out the impurities, and leaving only a little sludge at the bottom?

It is said that around the seventh century, somewhere near the Red Sea—whether it was Ethiopia or Yemen is a subject of debate—a herd of goats ate the magenta berries of a local shrub and began to act strangely. In a classic 1935 study called *Coffee: The Epic of a Commodity*, the German journalist Heinrich Eduard Jacob described their behavior thus:

All night, for five nights in succession—nay, for seven or eight—they clambered over rocks, cutting capers, chasing one another, bleating fantastically. They turned their bearded heads hither and thither, with reddened eyes they gambolled convulsively when they caught sight of the goatherds, and then they darted off swift as arrows speeding from the bow.

6

Having observed the frisky goats, the imam of a nearby monastery—a sort of medieval Carlos Castaneda—roasted the berries in a chafing dish, crushed them in a mortar, mixed them with boiling water, and drank the brew. When he lay down, he couldn't sleep. His heartbeat quickened, his limbs felt light, his mood became cheerful and alert. "He was not merely thinking," wrote Jacob. "His thoughts had become concretely visible. He watched them from the right side and from the left, from above and from below. They raced like a team of horses." The imam found that he could juggle a dozen ideas in the time it normally took to consider a single one. His visual acuity increased; in the glow of his oil lamp, the parchment on his table looked unusually lustrous and the robe that hung on a nearby peg seemed to swell with life. He felt strengthened, as Jacob put it, "by heavenly food brought to him by the angels of Paradise."

Whoa! Little did the hopped-up imam know that while he and the goats were happily tripping, 1,3,7-trimethylxanthine (otherwise known as caffeine) was coursing through their veins, stimulating brain activity by blocking the uptake of adenosine, a neurotransmitter that, if left to its own devices, makes people (and goats) sleepy and depressed. Just enough of the stuff and you feel you've been fed by the angels of Paradise; too much, and Mr. Coffee Nerves (a diabolical

7

cartoon character with a twirly mustache who graced Postum ads in the 1930s) gets you in his grip.

Caffeine was first isolated in 1819, when the elderly Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who had swallowed oceans of coffee in his younger days and regretted his intemperance, handed a box of Arabian mocha coffee beans to a chemist named Friedlieb Ferdinand Runge and enjoined him to analyze their contents. Runge extracted an alkaloid that, as Jacob put it, "presents itself in the form of shining, white, needle-shaped crystals, reminding us of swansdown and still more of snow." Caffeine is so toxic that laboratory technicians who handle it in its purified state wear masks and gloves. In *The World of Caffeine*, by Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer, there is a photograph of the label from a jar of pharmaceutical-grade crystals. It reads in part:

Warning! May be harmful if inhaled or swallowed. Has caused mutagenic and reproductive effects laboratory animals. Inhalation causes rapid heart rate, excitement, dizziness, pain, collapse, hypotension, fever, shortness of breath. May cause headache, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, collapse and convulsions.

Anyone who doubts that caffeine is a drug should read some of the prose composed under its influence. Many of the books on coffee that currently crowd my desk share a certain . . . *velocity*, as if their authors, all terrifically buzzed at 3:00 A.M., couldn't get their words out fast enough and had to resort to italics, hyperbole, and sentences so long that by the time you get to the end you can't remember the beginning. (But that's only if you're uncaffeinated when you read them; if you've knocked back a couple of *cafés noirs* yourself, keeping pace is no sweat.) Heinrich Eduard Jacob boasts that his narrative was "given soul by a coffee-driven euphoria." Gregory Dicum and Nina Luttinger claim that while they were writing *The Coffee Book: Anatomy of an Industry from Crop to the Last Drop*, they

sucked down 83 double Americanos, 12 double espressos, 4 perfect ristrettos, 812 regular cups (from 241 French press-loads, plus 87 cups of drip coffee), 47 Turkish coffees, a half-dozen regrettable cups of flavored coffee, 10 pounds of organic coffee, 7 pounds of fair trade coffee, a quarter pound of chicory and a handful of hemp seeds as occasional adjuncts, 1 can of ground supermarket coffee (drunk mostly iced), 6 canned or bottled coffee drinks, 2 pints of coffee beer, a handful of mochas, 1 pint of coffee concentrate, a couple of cappuccinos, 1 espresso soda, and, just to see, a lone double tall low-fat soy orange decaf latte.

Their book contains only 196 pages and doesn't look as if it took very long to write; that decaf latte aside, the authors' caffeine quota

per day must have been prodigious. (But note their exactitude: coffee makes you peppy, but it doesn't make you sloppy.)

The contemporary master of the genre is Stewart Lee Allen, known as "the Hunter S. Thompson of coffee journalism," whose gonzo masterpiece, *The Devil's Cup*, entailed the consumption of "2,920 liters of percolated, drip, espresso, latte, cappuccino, macchiato, con panna, instant and americana." (It isn't very long, either. By the time Allen finished, his blood must have been largely composed of 1,3,7-trimethylxanthine.) Following the historical routes by which coffee spread around the globe, Allen gets wired in Harrar, Sana, Is-tanbul, Vienna, Munich, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and various points across the United States, attempting to finance his travels and his coffee habit with complicated transactions involving forged passports and smuggled art. He ends up on Route 66, in search of the worst cup of coffee in America, in a Honda Accord driveway filled with every form of caffeine he can think of: Stimu-Chew, Water Joe, Krank, hi-caf candy, and a vial of caffeine crystals (scored from an Internet site that features images of twitching eyeballs) whose resemblance to cocaine occasions some exciting psychopharmacological plot twists when a state trooper pulls him over in Athens, Tennessee.

But in the realm of twitching eyeballs, even Stewart Lee Allen can't hold a candle to Honoré de Balzac, the model for every espresso-swilling writer who has followed in his jittery footsteps. What hashish was to Baudelaire, opium to Coleridge, cocaine to Robert Louis Stevenson, nitrous oxide to Robert Southey, mescaline to Aldous Huxley, and Benzedrine to Jack Kerouac, caffeine was to Balzac. The habit started early. Like a preppie with an expensive connection, he ran up alarming debts with a concierge who, for a price, was willing to sneak contraband coffee beans into Balzac's boarding school. As an adult, grinding out novels eighteen hours a day while listening for the rap of creditors at the door, Balzac observed the addict's classic regimen, boosting his doses as his tolerance mounted. First he drank one cup a day, then a few cups, then many cups, then forty cups. Finally, by using less and less water, he increased the concentration of each fix until he was eating dry coffee grounds: "a horrible, rather brutal method," he wrote, "that I recommend only to men of excessive vigor, men with thick black hair and skin covered with liver spots, men with big square hands and legs shaped like bowling pins." Although the recipe was hell on the stomach, it dispatched caffeine to the brain with exquisite efficiency.

From that moment on, everything becomes agitated. Ideas quick-march into motion like battalions of a grand army to its legendary fighting ground, and the battle rages. Memories charge in, bright flags on high; the cavalry of metaphor deploys with a magnificent gallop; the artillery of logic rushes up with clattering wagons and cartridges; on imagination's orders, sharpshooters sight and fire; forms and shapes and characters rear up; the paper is spread with ink.

Could that passage have been written on decaf?

Balzac's coffee-pot is displayed at 47 rue Raynouard in Paris, where he lived for much of his miserable last decade, writing *La Cousine Bette* and *Le Cousin Pons*, losing his health, and escaping bill collectors through a secret door. My friend Adam (who likes his espresso strong but with sugar) visited the house a few years ago. "The coffee-pot is red and white china," he wrote me, "and bears Balzac's monogram. It's an elegant, neat little thing, almost nautical in appearance. I can imagine it reigning serenely over the otherwise-general squalor of his later life, a small pharos of caffeine amid the gloom."

When I was fifteen, I went to Paris myself. I didn't realize it at the time, but that summer I stood at a fateful crossroads. One way led to coffee, the other to liquor.

I was a student on a high school French program in an era when the construction of *in loco parentis* was considerably looser than it is now. I began each day with a *café au lait* at a local patisserie and ended it with a *crème de menthe frappé* at a bar. One afternoon, after we had left Paris and were traveling through southern France, the director of the program invited me to lunch at a three-star restaurant in Vienne, where we shared *pâté de foie gras en brioche*, *mousse de truite Périgueux*, *turbot à la crème aux herbes*, *pinolade aux herbes*, *gratin dauphinois*, *fromages*, *gâteau aux marrons*, *petits fours*, and a Brut Crémant '62. I'd never drunk half a bottle of wine before. Afterward, en route to Avignon in Monsieur Cosnard's Mercedes, I was asked to help navigate, a task that appeared inexplicably difficult until I realized I was holding the map upside down.

The conclusion was clear: *Why would anyone want to feel like this?* Although I never became a teetotaler, I knew—especially when I woke up the next morning with a hangover—that I would cast my lot with caffeine, not with alcohol. Why would I wish my senses to be dulled when they could be sharpened? Why would I wish to forget when I could remember? Why would I wish to mumble when I could scintillate? Of course, since even in those days I was a loquacious workaholic who liked to stay up late, you might think I'd pick

a drug that would nudge me closer to the center of the bell curve instead of pushing me farther out on the edge—but of course I didn't. Who does? Don't we all just keep doing the things that make us even more like ourselves?

As I lay in bed with a godawful headache, sunlight streamed through the open window, and so did the smell of good French coffee from the hotel kitchen downstairs.

Heinrich Eduard Jacob called coffee the "anti-Bacchus." By the middle of the seventeenth century, when it had filtered westward from the Middle East and begun to captivate Europe, its potential consumers were in dire need of sobering up. "The eyes, the blood-vessels, the senses of the men of those days were soured in beer," observed Jacob. "It choked their livers, their voices, and their hearts." The average Englishman drank three liters of beer a day—nearly two six-packs—and spent a lot of time bumping into lamp-posts and falling into gutters. Coffee was hailed as a salubrious alternative. As an anonymous poet put it in 1674, "When foggy Ale, leav'ing up mighty trains/Of muddy vapours, had besieged our Brains./Then Heaven in Pity . . ./First sent amongst us this All-healing Berry."

Between 1645 and 1750, as coffeehouses sprang up in Paris, Vienna, Leipzig, Amsterdam, Rome, and Venice, the All-healing Berry defogged innumerable Continental brains. But until tea gained the upper hand around 1730, the English were the undisputed kings of coffee. By the most conservative estimates, London had five hundred coffeehouses at the turn of the eighteenth century. (If New York City were similarly equipped today, it would have nearly eight thousand.) These weren't merely places to drink the muddy liquid that one critic likened to "syrup of soot or essence of old shoes." In the days when public libraries were nonexistent and journalism was in its embryonic stages, they were a vital center of news, gossip, and education—"penny universities" whose main business, in the words of a 1657 newspaper ad, was "PUBLIC INTERCOURSE."

London had a coffeehouse for everyone (as long as you were male). If you were a gambler, you went to White's. If you were a physician, you went to Garraway's or Child's. If you were a businessman, you went to Lloyd's, which later evolved into the great insurance house. If you were a scientist, you went to the Grecian, where Isaac Newton, Edmund Halley, and Hans Sloane once staged a public dissection of a dolphin that had been caught in the Thames. If you were a journalist, you went to Button's, where Joseph Addison had set up a "Reader's Letter-box" shaped like a lion's head; you

could post submissions to *The Guardian* in its mouth. And if you were a man of letters, you—along with Pope, Pepys, and Dryden—went to Will's, where you could join a debate on whether Milton should have written *Paradise Lost* in rhymed couplets instead of blank verse. These coffeehouses changed the course of English social history by demonstrating how pleasant it was to hang out in a place where (according to a 1674 set of Rules and Orders of the Coffee House) "Gentry, Tradesmen, all are welcome hither, / and may without affront sit down together." And they changed the course of English literature by turning monologists into conversationalists. A 1705 watercolor that now hangs in the British Museum depicts a typical establishment, a high-ceilinged room dominated by a huge black coffee cauldron that simmers over a blazing fire. The periwigged patrons are sipping coffee, smoking pipes, reading news-sheets, and scribbling in notebooks, but most of all—you can tell from their gesticulations—they are talking.

Looking back, I see that my evenings in Dunster House were a penny university in miniature. It therefore saddens me to report that these days my coffee-drinking is usually a solitary affair, a Balzacian response to deadlines (though in smaller doses) rather than an opportunity for PUBLIC INTERCOURSE. Time is scarcer than it used to be; I make my coffee with a disposable paper filter stuffed into a little plastic cone, not in a *coffetière à piston*. My customary intake is only a cup or two a day—still with milk and sugar—though I ratchet up my consumption when I'm writing. In the spirit of participatory journalism, every word of this essay has been written under the influence of 1,3,7-trimethylxanthine, in quantities sufficient to justify the use, after a respite of thirty years, of the mug with the polka-dotted pig.

My coffee is in every way a weaker brew than it once was, but I could never give it up entirely. This is not just a matter of habit, sentiment, or taste; it is more akin to the reasons that, long ago, the Galla people of Ethiopia ate ground coffee mixed with animal fat before they went off to fight, or that the night before every battle of the Civil War, you would have seen hundreds of campfires flickering in the darkness, each surmounted by a pot of thick, black, courage-inducing coffee.

I remember a morning five years ago when I took a dawn flight to Fort Myers, Florida. My father had just been hospitalized with what looked like—and in fact turned out to be—terminal cancer, and the task of dealing with doctors, nurses, and hospice workers had fallen to me. I'd been up all night, and I stumbled off the plane so bleary I could

hardly walk. There, shimmering like a mirage at the end of the jetway, in the midst of what on my last visit had been a wasteland of Pizza Huts and Burger Kings, stood a newly opened Starbucks.

I know, I know. Heartless corporate giant. Monster of coast-to-coast uniformity. Killer of mom-and-pop cafés. But that's not what I thought at that moment. I thought: I'm going to order a grande latte with whole milk. I'm going to pour in two packets of Sugar at the Raw, and stir really well so there are no undissolved crystals at the bottom. I'm going to sit down and drink it slowly. Then I'm going to drive to the hospital.

As I walked toward the counter, I said to myself: *I can do this.*

MEANINGS AND VALUES

1. Paragraphs 1–4 focus on the writer's college experiences. What other sections does the essay have, and what subject areas do they cover as a way of defining *coffee*, its meanings, and its roles for people?
2. Why are Paragraphs 1–4 filled with sophisticated, unfamiliar terms along with extensive attention to trivial details?
3. What does the history of coffee and its uses in Paragraphs 5–14 add to the definition of coffee?

EXPOSITORY TECHNIQUES

1. The writer opens each of these sections with references to time: 15–18, 19–21, and 22–26. What are these references? How do they serve to tie the parts of the essay together? What other sections open in similar ways? (See "Guide to Terms": *Transition*.)
2. Which definition strategies does the writer use in this essay, and where? (See "Developing Definitions," pp. 284–286.)
3. At times in the essay, the writer indicates more or less directly the effects of coffee and its meaning for coffee drinkers. Identify these statements.
4. Does the essay seem to indicate that it is possible to provide a concise definition of coffee? If so, state it in your own words. If not, explain where in the essay the writer comes closest to defining the meaning of coffee.

DICTION AND VOCABULARY

1. In the last sentence of Paragraph 4, Fadiman offers an extended comparison (an analogy). State it in your own words, and explain why you find it accurate and effective, or not. (See the introduction to Chapter 6 for a discussion of Analogy; see also Guide: *Analogy*.)
2. The opening four paragraphs of the essay contain many allusions. Identify as many as you can. (Guide: *Figures of Speech*.)
 - a. Do you think readers are expected to understand these allusions? If not, why did the writer put them in the text?
3. This essay contains words likely to be unfamiliar to many readers. Some are used to indicate the writer's state of mind at the time of events. Others add an exotic or faraway feel to the essay. If you do not know the meaning of them, look them up in a dictionary.

READ TO WRITE

1. **Collaborating:** Coffee isn't the only substance or activity that people make an important part of their lives. Working in a group, brainstorm other such substances or activities as possible topics for papers, and choose one to list details that might be used in an essay that provides a definition of the topic.
2. **Considering Audience:** Are Anne Fadiman's college experiences or her love of coffee typical of college students today? In a paragraph or two, indicate how you would revise the essay so that it more clearly reflects the interests, attitudes, and values of the majority of contemporary college students.
3. **Developing an Essay:** Using Fadiman's approach, define something you love by its good effects in various times and places so that others can understand why you consider it so important.

(NOTE: Suggestions for essays requiring development by DEFINITION are on pp. 326–327 at the end of this chapter.)



Issues and Ideas

Clarifying Values and Roles

- Stephen L. Carter, *The Insufficiency of Honesty*
- Mary Pipher, *Beliefs About Families*

STEPHEN L. CARTER

STEPHEN L. CARTER is professor of law at Yale Law School and the author of several controversial but highly respected and tightly reasoned books that explore issues in contemporary ethics, politics, and social relationships. After graduating from Yale Law School, he had a variety of professional experiences, including clerking for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and working in a prestigious law firm. Carter's books are *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (1992), *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (1994), *The Confirmation Mess: Cleaning Up the Federal Appointments Mess* (1995), *Integrity* (1997), and *Civility* (1999) (nonfiction); and *The Emperor of Ocean Park* (2002) (a novel). His most recent works are *Jericho's Fall* (2009) and *The Violence of Peace: America's Wars in the Age of Obama* (2011).

The Insufficiency of Honesty

Integrity is not simply a term or idea. It refers to a way of acting and of discerning the qualities of our actions. Integrity may be something we all claim to admire and wish to have ourselves, but as Stephen L. Carter points out in this essay first published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, it can be very difficult to achieve.

A couple of years ago I began a university commencement address by telling the audience that I was going to talk about integrity. The crowd broke into applause. Applause! Just because they had heard the word "integrity"; that's how starved for it they were. They had no idea how I was using the word, or what I was going to say about integrity, or, indeed, whether I was for it or against it. But they knew they liked the idea of talking about it.

Very well, let us consider this word "integrity." Integrity is like the weather: everybody talks about it but nobody knows what to do about it. Integrity is that stuff that we always want more of. Some say that we need to return to the good old days when we had a lot more of it. Others say that we as a nation have never really had enough of it. Hardly anybody stops to explain exactly what we mean by it, or how we know it is a good thing, or why everybody needs to have the same amount of it. Indeed, the only trouble with integrity is that everybody who uses the word seems to mean something slightly different.

For instance, when I refer to integrity, do I mean simply "honesty"? The answer is no; although honesty is a virtue of importance, it is a different virtue from integrity. Let us, for simplicity, think of honesty as not lying; and let us further accept Sissela Bok's definition of a lie: "any intentionally deceptive message which is *stated*." Plainly, one cannot have integrity without being honest (although, as we shall see, the matter gets complicated), but one can certainly be honest and yet have little integrity.

When I refer to integrity, I have something very specific in mind. Integrity, as I will use the term, requires three steps: discerning what is right and what is wrong; acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right and wrong. The first criterion captures the idea that integrity requires a degree of moral reflectiveness. The second brings in the ideal of a person of integrity as steadfast, a quality that includes keeping one's commitments. The third reminds us that a person of integrity can be trusted.

The first point to understand about the difference between honesty and integrity is that a person may be entirely honest without ever engaging in the hard work of discernment that integrity requires: she may tell us quite truthfully what she believes without ever taking the time to figure out whether what she believes is good and right and true. The problem may be as simple as someone's foolishly saying something that hurts a friend's feelings; a few moments of thought would have revealed the likelihood of the hurt and the lack of necessity for the comment. Or the problem may be more complex, as when a man who was raised from birth in a society that preaches racism states his belief in one race's inferiority as a fact, without ever really considering that perhaps this deeply held view is wrong. Certainly the racist is being honest—he is telling us what he actually thinks—but his honesty does not add up to integrity.

Telling Everything You Know

A wonderful epigram sometimes attributed to the filmmaker Sam Goldwyn goes like this: "The most important thing in acting is honesty; once you learn to fake that, you're in." The point is that honesty can be something one *seems* to have. Without integrity, what passes for honesty often is nothing of the kind; it is fake honesty—or it is honest but irrelevant and perhaps even immoral.

Consider an example. A man who has been married for fifty years confesses to his wife on his deathbed that he was unfaithful thirty-five years earlier. The dishonesty was killing his spirit, he says. Now he has cleared his conscience and is able to die in peace.

The husband has been honest—sort of. He has certainly unburdened himself. And he has probably made his wife (soon to be his widow) quite miserable in the process, because even if she forgives him, she will not be able to remember him with quite the vivid image of love and loyalty that she had hoped for. Arranging his own emotional affairs to ease his transition to death, he has shifted to his wife the burden of confusion and pain, perhaps for the rest of her life. Moreover, he has attempted his honesty at the one time in his life when it carries no risk; acting in accordance with what you think is right and risking no loss in the process is a rather thin and unadmirable form of honesty.

Besides, even though the husband has been honest in a sense, he has now twice been unfaithful to his wife: once thirty-five years ago, when he had his affair, and again when, nearing death, he decided that his own peace of mind was more important than hers. In trying to be honest he has violated his marriage vow by acting toward his wife not with love but with naked and perhaps even cruel self-interest.

As my mother used to say, you don't have to tell people everything you know. Lying and nondisclosure, as the law often recognizes, are not the same thing. Sometimes it is actually illegal to tell what you know, as, for example, in the disclosure of certain financial information by market insiders. Or it may be unethical, as when a lawyer reveals a confidence entrusted to her by a client. It may be a simple bad manners, as in the case of a gratuitous comment to a colleague on his or her attire. And it may be subject to religious punishment, as when a Roman Catholic priest breaks the seal of the confessional—an offense that carries automatic excommunication.

In all the cases just mentioned, the problem with telling everything you know is that somebody else is harmed. Harm may not be

the intention, but it is certainly the effect. Honesty is most laudable when we risk harm to ourselves; it becomes a good deal less so if we instead risk harm to others when there is no gain to anyone other than ourselves. Integrity may counsel keeping our secrets in order to spare the feelings of others. Sometimes, as in the example of the wayward husband, the reason we want to tell what we know is precisely to shift our pain onto somebody else—a course of action dictated less by integrity than by self-interest. Fortunately, integrity and self-interest often coincide, as when a politician of integrity is rewarded with our votes. But often they do not, and it is at those moments that our integrity is truly tested.

Error

Another reason that honesty alone is no substitute for integrity is that if forthrightness is not preceded by discernment, it may result in the expression of an incorrect moral judgment. In other words, I may be honest about what I believe, but if I have never tested my beliefs, I may be wrong. And here I mean "wrong" in a particular sense: the proposition in question is wrong if I would change my mind about it after hard moral reflection.

Consider this example. Having been taught all his life that women are not as smart as men, a manager gives the women on his staff less-challenging assignments than he gives the men. He does this, he believes, for their own benefit: he does not want them to fail, and he believes that they will if he gives them tougher assignments. Moreover, when one of the women on his staff does poor work, he does not berate her as harshly as he would a man, because he expects nothing more. And he claims to be acting with integrity because he is acting according to his own deepest beliefs.

The manager fails the most basic test of integrity. The question is not whether his actions are consistent with what he most deeply believes but whether he has done the hard work of discerning whether what he most deeply believes is right. The manager has not taken this harder step.

Moreover, even within the universe that the manager has constructed for himself, he is not acting with integrity. Although he is obviously wrong to think that the women on his staff are not as good as the men, even were he right, that would not justify applying different standards to their work. By so doing he betrays both his obligation to the institution that employs him and his duty as a manager to evaluate his employees.

The problem that the manager faces is an enormous one in our practical politics, where having the dialogue that makes democracy work can seem impossible because of our tendency to cling to our views even when we have not examined them. As Jean Bethke Elshtain has said, borrowing from John Courtney Murray, our politics are so fractured and contentious that we often cannot even reach *disagreement*. Our refusal to look closely at our own most cherished principles is surely a large part of the reason. Socrates thought the unexamined life not worth living. But the unhappy truth is that few of us actually have the time for constant reflection on our views—on public or private morality. Examine them we must, however, or we will never know whether we might be wrong.

None of this should be taken to mean that integrity as I have described it presupposes a single correct truth. If, for example, your integrity-guided search tells you that affirmative action is wrong, and my integrity-guided search tells me that affirmative action is right, we need not conclude that one of us lacks integrity. As it happens, I believe—both as a Christian and as a secular citizen who struggles toward moral understanding—that we *can* find true and sound answers to our moral questions. But I do not pretend to have found very many of them, nor is an exposition of them my purpose here.

It is the case not that there aren't any right answers but that, given human fallibility, we need to be careful in assuming that we have found them. However, today's political talk about how it is wrong for the government to impose one person's morality on somebody else is just mindless chatter. Every law imposes one person's morality on somebody else, because law has only two functions: to tell people to do what they would rather not or to forbid them to do what they would.

And if the surveys can be believed, there is far more moral agreement in America than we sometimes allow ourselves to think. One of the reasons that character education for young people makes so much sense to so many people is precisely that there seems to be a core set of moral understandings—we might call them the American Core—that most of us accept. Some of the virtues in this American Core are, one hopes, relatively noncontroversial. About 500 American communities have signed on to Michael Josephson's program to emphasize the "six pillars" of good character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, fairness, and citizenship. These virtues might lead to a similarly noncontroversial set of political values: having an honest regard for ourselves and others, protecting freedom of thought and religious belief, and refusing to steal or murder.

Honesty and Competing Responsibilities

A further problem with too great an exaltation of honesty is that it may allow us to escape responsibilities that morality bids us bear. If honesty is substituted for integrity, one might think that if I say I am not planning to fulfill a duty, I need not fulfill it. But it would be a peculiar morality indeed that granted us the right to avoid our moral responsibilities simply by stating our intention to ignore them. Integrity does not permit such an easy escape.

Consider an example. Before engaging in sex with a woman, her lover tells her that if she gets pregnant, it is her problem, not his. She says that she understands. In due course she does wind up pregnant. If we believe, as I hope we do, that the man would ordinarily have a moral responsibility toward both the child he will have helped to bring into the world and the child's mother, then his honest statement of what he intends does not spare him that responsibility.

This vision of responsibility assumes that not all moral obligations stem from consent or from a stated intention. The linking of obligations to promises is a rather modern and perhaps uniquely Western way of looking at life, and perhaps a luxury that only the well-to-do can afford. As Fred and Shulamit Korn (a philosopher and an anthropologist) have pointed out, "If one looks at ethnographic accounts of other societies, one finds that, while obligations everywhere play a crucial role in social life, promising is not preeminent among the sources of obligation and is not even mentioned by most anthropologists." The Kornes have made a study of Tonga, where promises are virtually unknown but the social order is remarkably stable. If life without any promises seems extreme, we Americans sometimes go too far the other way, parsing not only our contracts but even our marriage vows in order to discover the absolute minimum obligation that we have to others as a result of our promises.

That some societies in the world have worked out evidently functional structures of obligation without the need for promise or consent does not tell us what *we* should do. But it serves as a reminder of the basic proposition that our existence in civil society creates a set of mutual responsibilities that philosophers used to capture in the fiction of the social contract. Nowadays, here in America, people seem to spend their time thinking of even cleverer ways to avoid their obligations, instead of doing what integrity commands and fulfilling them. And all too often honesty is their excuse.

MEANINGS AND VALUES

1. Most readers are likely to consider honesty a good trait. Why, therefore, do you think Carter created a definition that points out its shortcomings? What do you think was his overall purpose in writing the essay? Do you believe the essay has more than one purpose? If so, what are they? (See "Guide to Terms": *Purpose*.)
2. List the reasons the author gives for considering honesty insufficient. State in your own words why the author believes that the men in Paragraphs 7-9 and 21 have honesty but lack integrity.
3. Does this essay have a thesis statement? If so, where is it? Does it adequately sum up the main idea of the entire essay? Why, or why not? If the essay does not have a thesis statement, is it nonetheless organized around a main idea or theme? What is it? (Guide: *Thesis*.) Explain why you consider the essay unified or not unified. (Guide: *Unity*.)

EXPOSITORY TECHNIQUES

1. If one of the main purposes of this essay is to define *integrity*, why does the writer spend so much time discussing the meaning of *honesty*? In formulating your answer, take into account various definition strategies and the likely responses of readers to concepts like honesty.
2. What is the main definition strategy Carter employs in this essay? How is the organization of the essay related to this strategy? Be specific in answering this question. What other definition patterns does the writer employ, and where in the essay does he use them?
3. Which paragraphs in the essay are devoted wholly, or mostly, to qualification? (Guide: *Qualification*.) What role(s) do they play in helping develop the definitions? Why would the essay be weaker without them?
4. Where in the essay does the writer use transitions at the beginnings of paragraphs to highlight the essay's organization and indicate the definition strategy he is employing? (Guide: *Transition*.)

DICTION AND VOCABULARY

1. Throughout the essay, Carter uses contrasting words and concepts to explain the difference between honesty and integrity. Sometimes the contrasts involve the denotation of words and sometimes the connotations. (Guide: *Connotation/Denotation*.) Discuss the contrasts as they appear in Paragraphs 6, 8, and 9, and explain the use Carter makes of them. (Guide: *Diction*.) Explain the extent to which Carter reinforces the contrasts through sentence structure. (Guide: *Syntax*.)
2. In the course of the essay, Carter repeats a small number of words quite frequently, often varying their form. What are the words? How

widely admired and often receive considerable money for their work, yet they must face situations that the general public does not fully understand. Stars face danger; give up their privacy; and work long, hard hours. Referring to celebrities as "stars" is quite appropriate because their lives are as far from ours as the stars are distant from the ground we stand on.

Works Cited

- Braudy, Leo. *Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.
- Fowles, Jib. *Starstruck*. Chicago: Smithsonian, 1992. Print.
- Lane, Yoti. *The Psychology of the Actor*. Westport: Greenwood, 1959. Print.
- L'Heureux, Lori. Survey. U of Rhode Island, Kingston, 7–10 Nov. 1995. TS.

JOHN BERENDT

JOHN BERENDT was born in Syracuse, New York, in 1939. He was a student at Harvard and received his B.A. in 1961. A journalist, essayist, and writer of nonfiction, he has also worked as an editor and columnist at *Esquire*, an editor at *Holiday* and *New York* magazines, and as an associate producer of the *David Frost Show* and the *Dick Cavett Show*. His essays and articles have appeared in numerous magazines, including *Forbes*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Esquire*, *Architectural Digest*, and the *New Yorker*. His best-selling book, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994) is a nonfiction account of unusual characters and scandalous goings-on in Savannah, Georgia. He is also the author of *The City of Falling Angels* (2005).

The Hoax

In this essay, first published in *Esquire*, Berendt takes a relatively straightforward approach to definition, yet through skillful writing and wit, he manages to offer a fresh and insightful understanding of a familiar term and the behavior it designates.

When the humorist Robert Benchley was an undergraduate at Harvard eighty years ago, he and a couple of friends showed up one morning at the door of an elegant Beacon Hill mansion, dressed as furniture repairmen. They told the housekeeper they had come to pick up the sofa. Five minutes later they carried the sofa out the door, put it on a truck, and drove it three blocks away to another house, where, posing as deliverymen, they plunked it down in the parlor. That evening, as Benchley well knew, the couple living in house A were due to attend a party in house B. Whatever the outcome—and I'll get to that shortly—it was guaranteed to be a defining example of how proper Bostonians handle social crises. The wit inherent in Benchley's practical joke elevated it from the level of prank to the more respectable realm of hoax.

To qualify as a hoax, a prank must have magic in it—the word is derived from *hocus-pocus*, after all. Daring and irony are useful ingredients, too. A good example of a hoax is the ruse perpetrated by David Hampton, the young black man whose pretense of being Sidney Poitier's son inspired John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation*. Hampton managed to insinuate himself into two of New York's most sophisticated households—one headed by the president of the public-television station WNET, the other by the dean of the

Columbia School of Journalism. Hampton's hoax touched a number of sensitive themes: snobbery, class, race, and sex, all of which playwright Guare deftly exploited.

Hampton is a member of an elite band of famous impostors that includes a half-mad woman who for fifty years claimed to be Anastasia, the lost daughter of the assassinated czar Nicholas II; and a man named Harry Gerguson, who became a Hollywood restaurateur and darling of society in the 1930s and 1940s as the ersatz Russian prince Mike Romanoff.

Forgeries have been among the better hoaxes. Fake Vermeers painted by an obscure Dutch artist, Hans van Meegeren, were so convincing that they fooled art dealers, collectors, and museums. The hoax came to light when van Meegeren was arrested as a Nazi collaborator after the war. To prove he was not a Nazi, he admitted he had sold a fake Vermeer to Hermann Göring for \$256,000. Then he owned up to having created other "Vermeers," and to prove he could do it, he painted *Jesus in the Temple* in the style of Vermeer while under guard in jail.

In a bizarre twist, a story much like van Meegeren's became the subject of the book *Fake!*, by Clifford Irving, who in 1972 attempted to pull off a spectacular hoax of his own: a wholly fraudulent "authorized" biography of Howard Hughes. Irving claimed to have conducted secret interviews with the reclusive Hughes, and McGraw-Hill gave him a big advance. Shortly before publication, Hughes surfaced by telephone and denied that he had ever spoken with Irving. Irving had already spent \$100,000 of the advance; he was convicted of fraud and sent to jail.

As it happens, we are used to hoaxes where I come from. I grew up just a few miles down the road from Cardiff, New York—a town made famous by the Cardiff Giant. As we learned in school, a farmer named Newell complained, back in 1889, that his well was running dry, and while he and his neighbors were digging a new one, they came upon what appeared to be the fossilized remains of a man twelve feet tall. Before the day was out, Newell had erected a tent and posted a sign charging a dollar for a glimpse of the "giant"—three dollars for a longer look. Throngs descended on Cardiff. It wasn't long before scientists determined that the giant had been carved from a block of gypsum. The hoax came undone fairly quickly after that, but even so—as often happens with hoaxes—the giant became an even bigger attraction *because* it was a hoax. P. T. Barnum offered Newell a fortune for the giant, but Newell refused, and it was then that he got his comeuppance. Barnum simply made a replica and put it on display as the genuine Cardiff Giant. Newell's gig was ruined.

The consequences of hoaxes are what give them spice. Orson Welles's lifelike 1938 radio broadcast of H. C. Wells's *War of the Worlds* panicked millions of Americans, who were convinced that martians had landed in New Jersey. The forged diary of Adolf Hitler embarrassed historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, who had vouched for its authenticity, and *Newsweek* and the *Sunday Times* of London, both of which published excerpts in 1983 shortly before forensic tests proved that there were nylon fibers in the paper it was written on, which wouldn't have been possible had it originated before 1950. The five-hundred-thousand-year-old remains of Piltdown man, found in 1912, had anthropologists confused about human evolution until 1953, when fluoride tests exposed the bones as an elaborate modern hoax. And as for Robert Benchley's game on Beacon Hill, no one said a word about the sofa all evening, although there it sat in plain sight. One week later, however, couple A sent an anonymous package to couple B. It contained the sofa's slipcovers.

MEANINGS AND VALUES

1. State Berendt's definition of a hoax in your own words, and indicate the difference between a hoax and a practical joke or prank. Look up *hoax* in a dictionary, and tell how Berendt's definition differs, if at all, from the one you encounter there.
2. Restate the meaning of this sentence, "The consequences of hoaxes are what give them spice" (Par. 7), and discuss whether the examples that follow it provide satisfactory support for the writer's conclusion. (See "Guide to Terms": *Evaluation*.)
3. Other than defining the term *hoax*, what purposes do you think the writer had in mind for this essay? (Guide: *Purpose*.)

EXPOSITORY TECHNIQUES

1. Discuss how the way Berendt presents the examples in Paragraphs 2, 3, and 6 makes them seem imaginative (and somewhat harmless) escapades rather than criminal frauds or deceptions.
2. Determine what definition strategies Berendt uses in this essay. Which seem most effective, and why? (Guide: *Evaluation*.)
3. Evaluate the strategy Berendt uses to open and close the essay. What makes it successful or unsuccessful?