84, Charing Cross Road Study Guide

84, Charing Cross Road by Helene Hanff

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Introduction

84, Charing Cross Road, published in 1970, is constructed from a collection of correspondence between the author and a London bookseller, Frank Doel. The relationship began as Hanff delved into the work of a professor at Cambridge University. Professor "Q," as he is called, became the catalyst for Hanff's letter writing. Her admiration for the professor fueled her pursuit of classic literature, resulting in the inquiries comprising this work. *84, Charing Cross Road* spans a twenty-year period, incidentally chronicling events abroad, such as Winston Churchill's 1951 election in London and the U.S. Democratic presidential nomination in 1960.

This story thematically touches on the ideas of lack and sufficiency, whether it be Helene's bibliomania (obsession for books) or a black-market trade of eggs for a pair of pantyhose in London. It is a story of beginnings and endings as represented by each letter, from date to signature. The power of language figures prominently, presenting the challenge of inference in the white space of the text as Helene waits breathlessly for her next letter to arrive. Finally, it is a story of appearances for exactly the same reason: the only information the reader has is based on a series of letters, hardly the means by which one can accurately infer much about the characters. Despite what seem to be shortcomings, the appeal of this mysterious plot is what serves to entice and delight the reader's imagination.

Author Biography

Helene Hanff was born April 15, 1916, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although she attended Temple University for one year, she did not pursue a degree. Critics attribute the bulk of her literary background to her penchant for books. In her work entitled *Q's Legacy*, she speaks of the professor whose reading recommendations became the foundation for her literary education. A self-taught classicist, Hanff was a screenwriter and author. She was first employed as a manuscript reader for Paramount Pictures, and then accepted a position as a television scriptwriter for Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and National Broadcasting Company (NBC).

The author's work is largely comprised of publications for children and young adults, constituting a collection of historical works for a young audience. However, she is perhaps most recognized for her work addressing adult audiences. *84, Charing Cross Road* is her greatest achievement in this regard, in terms of the notoriety she received from it. Published in 1970, the success of the work made subsequent adaptations for film and stage possible. *84, Charing Cross Road* chronicles twenty years of Hanff's life as a writer through her correspondence with the employees at a London-based antiquarian bookstore, Marks & Co.

Hanff's experience as a playwright is attributable to professional activity with the Theater Guild. She is the author of thirty scripts for television's *Hallmark Hall of Fame* and *Matinee Theater,* and contributed to eight United States Army training films. Other television work includes a writing stint with the program *The Adventures of Ellery Queen.* Her awards include a CBS grant-in-aid for work on historic scripts for television. She has also contributed to magazines such as *Harper's, The New Yorker,* and *Reader's Digest.*

Other career highlights include her monthly "Women's Hour" broadcasts over BBC radio, as recalled in *Letter from New York*, her 1992 book which contains excerpts from the program. Hanff's contribution to the radio show characterizes her love for New York, as shared in upbeat anecdotes and other random observations of her community. After a long and fruitful career, Hanff died of pneumonia April 9, 1997, in New York City.

Plot Summary

Correspondence, October 5, 1949 to November 1, 1950

Helene Hanff is responding to an advertisement for a bookseller specializing in out-of-print books. Knowing nothing of Marks & Co. in London, she encloses a list of "her most pressing problems": copies of secondhand books she cannot find, and a request that they must be clean copies costing no more than $5.00. The books arrive safely, and with the help of a neighbor in Helene's New York apartment building, Helene is able to determine the cost in dollars per British pound.

"Kindly inform the Church of England they have loused up the most beautiful prose ever written," says Helene in a letter to Marks & Co. upon receipt of a Bible, complaining that the Church of England has tinkered with the Vulgate Latin. To justify her disappointment, she recites her own family tree, recalling a Catholic sister-in-law, Presbyterian cousins, and others in her family and their religious persuasions. She encloses four dollar bills, despite the bookseller's request to be "safe," in addition to her request for an additional item.

In another instance, Helene communicates her great enthusiasm for a Roman battle she happens on in a book she received from the store. She shares her delight in secondhand books, for precisely the reason that they have a tendency to fall open to what for her are often beloved passages. Taking comfort in a friendly copy of one of Hazlitt's books, she notes delightfully, "[Hazlitt's book] opened to 'I hate to read new books!'"

In the same letter, Helene writes that she has learned in a communication from a Marks & Co. employee that the occupants of the shop have been rationed to small amounts of meat and eggs, as have Londoners in general, to help with the war effort. Out of pity, Helene decides to send the booksellers at Charing Cross a six-pound ham. Later Frank Doel responds to Helene's kindness, expressing his gratitude and calling the food parcel something "we either never see or can only be had through the black market."

In March, Helene addresses Frank with complaints that he is slow to fill her book requests. She expresses her disappointment in not having received several books for Lent, as well as the fact that she is forced to scribble in the margins of books thereby risking her library card in the process. Exasperated, she adds, "I have made arrangements with the Easter bunny to bring you an Egg, he will get over there and find you have died of Inertia."

Cecily, another store employee, cannot help her curiosity, disclosing to Helene that she has been "dying to slip in a little note" with Helene's bills from the bookseller. Although Frank is not stuffy, Cecily admits that he looks upon Helene as "his private correspondent." She requests a snapshot of Helene and speculates as to her appearance. Cecily imagines her to be "young and very sophisticated," while others err

on the side of "studious-looking." Helene's description of herself is anything but flattering. She is admittedly "so unstudious," having not attended college, and claims to favor a "Broadway panhandler" in appearance.

Anticipating future travel, Helene asks Cecily to tell her about London. Sharing what she herself knows about London, she adds that a newspaperman confided in her that tourists go to London with preconceived notions. "I told him I'd go looking for the England of English literature, and he said: 'Then it's there.'"

Correspondence, February 2, 1951 to December 17, 1952

Helene is touched by the book of Elizabethan poems with pages edged in gold, sent from all at Marks & Co., in addition to letters sent from employees Megan Wells, Bill Humphries, and Frank Doel in a show of appreciation for her generosity. She downplays the food parcel she sent on Easter with "greetings from America—faithless friend that she is, pouring millions into rebuilding Japan and Germany while letting England starve" in the postwar 1950s.

Another moment reveals an exasperated Helene who cannot believe her beloved bookseller would send her a book of excerpts from *Pepys Diary* rather than the entire work, telling Frank "I could just spit." Frank responds apologetically, with much greater enthusiasm than he has demonstrated in the past. He assures Helene that there will be better times in the future for London, in anticipation of Winston Churchill's re-election. "You dizzy me," says Helene out of guilt for her sudden outburst over *Pepys Diary.*

In a letter to Maxie, aka Maxine, Helene requests that her friend purchase four pairs of nylons for the girls working at the bookseller and also for Frank's wife, after receiving a letter from Nora Doel. In her correspondence, Nora had shared the value of trading a tin of dried eggs for the stockings. Helene tells Maxie that, despite her desire to visit England and her beloved bookseller, she feels more comfortable writing "the most outrageous letters from a safe 3,000 miles away."

Helene also responds to Nora and Frank's acquisition of their first car, an extremely difficult commodity to come by new or, in this case, used. She shares her hardships with Frank, those of purging overflowing bookshelves and the cost of having her teeth capped. In her last letter in 1952, she admits to the uneven exchange of holiday gifts. "You'll eat yours up in a week. . . . I'll have mine till the day I die." Helene thrills in the idea that her scribblings in pale pencil will be discovered by "some book lover yet unborn."

Correspondence, May 3, 1953 to May 8, 1960

In 1953 Cecily tells Helene she should forget the care packages and save for a trip to London in 1955. In 1955, in a letter to Frank, Helene inquires whether Cecily is still in

Iraq. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me you've been publishing these mammoth catalogues all these years and this is the first time you ever bothered to send me one?" exclaims Helene in the same letter. She sends the letter along with a prayer request for the Brooklyn Dodgers to win the World Series.

"Will you tell Megan Wells she is out of her cotton picking mind," says Helene of a Marks & Co. employee's choice to move to South Africa. Changes are also afoot for the writer, whose eviction notice from her New York brownstone has pushed her to acquire "a real apartment with real furniture" and "wall-to-wall carpeting," although it means postponing her anticipated trip to London. "All this and the Dodgers disintegrating before my very eyes," she says of the entire affair.

Frank comforts Helene after hearing her television shows have moved to Hollywood. Five months later, Helene shares that she has won a $5,000 grant from CBS to write American history dramatizations. She kids with Frank, telling him that her first script will involve New York under seven years of British occupation, "and I marvel at how I rise above it to address you in friendly and forgiving fashion, your behavior over here from 1776 to 1783 was simply filthy."

Correspondence, "Sunday Night and a hell of a way to start 1960" to October 1969

Helene is struck enough by a giant Modern Library book given to her as a Christmas gift to devote a considerable amount of time corresponding with Frank about the work on New Year's Day. She considers the pairing of the works of John Donne and William Blake into one volume an absurdity. In the end, says Helene, "I'm being driven clear up the wall, Frankie, you have got to help me."

With only a $1,500 book advance for the next six months, Helene must watch her finances. "So I can't buy any books" she says, opting to visit the Society Library for a copy of *Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon,* only to find herself short on time to finish it. When she suggests Frank buy it to hold on reserve until a later date, Frank insists on sending six volumes to her without payment. "Your credit will always be good at Marks & Co.," he tells Helene.

"Enclosed-please-God-please-find a $10 bill," says Helene to Frank, who cannot bear to have *Memoirs* without paying something toward it. In a brief story about a dinner meeting with her editor from *Harper*'s, Helene talks about her dramatization of Walter Savage Landor's *Aesop and Rhodope* for Hallmark. Two hours before the program airs, she is dismayed to find a photo of a sculpture in the *New York Times.* The caption read "Rhodope, the most famous prostitute in Greece"—a fact she never knew while writing the show for the family program. Her editor, reveals Helene, was impatient rather than sympathetic. "You see how it is, Frankie," writes Helene, "you're the only soul alive who understands me."

On January 8, 1969, Helene is informed of Frank's death. He was unexpectedly rushed to the hospital for a ruptured appendix and died a week later. A letter from Nora followed some twenty-one days afterward. His wife pays him a glowing tribute, and admits her now growing awareness of his talents as letters and acknowledgements continue to reach her. The only other admission Nora makes is that she has always been envious of Helene's writing ability and of Helene and Frank's relationship.

When Maxine says she is going to London and asks Helene if she would like to go, Helene shares that she almost wept when asked if she would consider going, provided she had the fare. She decides that maybe it is best she did not go after having dreamt about it for so many years. Speaking to the mysteries of the England of English literature, she says, "maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Looking around the rug one thing's for sure: it's here." The work ends with the epilogue, a letter from one of Frank's daughters giving Helene permission to publish her letters with Marks & Co. in book form.

Letters, 1949 - 1950

Letters, 1949 - 1950 Summary

84, Charing Cross Road is Helene Hanff's collection of correspondence chronicling her long-distance friendships with the employees of a secondhand bookstore. The letters from Helene in New York City to the bookstore in London, England, span the time period of twenty years, October 1949 through October 1969.

Helene Hanff writes to the proprietors of the Marks & Co. bookstore in London, England, on October 5, 1949, in response to their advertisement in a literature review publication. The bookstore has advertised their services as "antiquarian booksellers," a term which slightly frightens Helene, but she presses on with her requests for secondhand books.

Helene receives her first letter from Marks & Co. The writer signs off only with the initials FPD and informs Helene that they have sent a few of the books she requested and will keep searching for the others. Helene responds a few weeks later that the books have arrived, and one in particular is too beautifully bound to sit on her orange-crate bookshelves. Helene asks the booksellers to please translate the invoices into American dollars although there is a girl in Helene's apartment building who has helped her convert the British pounds to American dollars up to this point.

The bookseller replies that Helene's money is received, but the bookseller prefers her to send money orders instead of cash. The next books on their way to Helene are the New Testaments, which Helene does not appreciate upon their arrival. The translation by the Church of England from the Vulgate Latin has destroyed the lyricism of the original manuscript.

Although Helene is Jewish, she does have friends and relatives who would not at all appreciate this translation. In an act of rebellion, Helene requests another book and sends cash once more in spite of being asked not to use cash. The bookseller apologizes for the New Testament and credits Helene's account. In reply, Helene would like to know the name of the person who is tending to her requests so that she may address him or her personally instead of just having the initials at the bottom of the letters coming from Marks & Co.

Helene mentions the British boyfriend of her upstairs neighbor and inquires about the state of rations in London, limiting families to two ounces of meat per week and only one egg per person per month. Helene has access to a catalog of fresh foods that can be shipped into England from Denmark and promises to send a gift package to Marks & Co. for the upcoming Christmas holiday.

In mid-December, a reply comes from Frank Doel, who is the person with the initials FPD who has been corresponding with Helene. Frank thanks Helene for her gift package, the items of which have been divided among the six employees in the store.

Helene does not receive any other response from Frank until March of 1950, and she sends a letter chastising him for his silence. Since Frank has not sent any books, Helene has been forced to borrow from the library, and she knows that they will not appreciate her scribbles in the margins, although Helene secretly delights in knowing that some unknown person will one day open that book and see her notes.

Helene makes arrangements to send an Easter gift with eggs and adds that she hopes the Easter Bunny does not arrive to find out that the shop employees have died of inertia. Helene requests a book of love poems for the upcoming spring and ends by wondering how the bookshop stays in business if they are so inactive with their other patrons. The Easter package arrives and is acknowledged by Frank, who also tells Helene that he does not have any books of love poems per her request. He says that he will send one as soon as it becomes available.

As a little twist in the correspondence, Helene receives a letter from a young woman named Cecily Farr, a bookstore employee. Cecily asks Helene not to disclose to Frank that she has written to Helene because Frank seems to think of Helene as his own personal customer. Cecily and the rest of the bookstore employees are intrigued by what Helene must look like and have determined that she must be very young and chic.

Others think Helene must be very studious with a wicked sense of humor, and they request a photograph of Helene so that they can fix her image in their minds. Cecily also describes Frank as a man in his late thirties married to an Irish woman who is his second wife. Cecily thanks Helene for the Easter package, especially the raisins and egg with which she could make a cake for her two children. Cecily closes and includes her home address in the event that Helene should ever want to write to her at home.

Helene replies to Cecily's letter with a more accurate description of herself as "about as smart-looking as a Broadway panhandler," who lives in moth-eaten sweaters and wool pants. Helene works in her brownstone apartment as a script reader and writer, and the landlord turns off the heat during the day since Helene is the only one in the building. This accounts for her wooly attire. Helene shares that she has never attended college but that she acquired her obsession with books after running into a Cambridge professor named Quiller-Couch or Q in a library one day.

Helene apologizes for her sometimes abrasive manner with Frank and hopes that his British reserve will not give him ulcers one day. Helene also asks Cecily to write to her about London as Helene has always dreamed of visiting England one day.

Several months pass before Helene receives her next letter from Frank. He apologizes for not writing sooner, but the bookstore has just now received some more of the books in which she is interested. Frank has put the books aside until Helene notifies him of her desire to purchase them.

Helene immediately replies that she does indeed want the two books mentioned in Frank's last letter. Helene assures Frank that Marks & Co. is her only source of secondhand books and asks him to still look for the books still remaining from her

original request. Helene has also returned to the habit of sending cash. When she attempted to send a money order, it was lost in transit, and she does not want the aggravation of that process again.

The next letter is one from Cecily in which she encloses some photographs of her, her children and her husband, Doug, who is in the Royal Air Force. Cecily extends an invitation to Helene to stay at her parents' home if she can visit England soon.

Helene's next letter to Frank chastises him for using crumpled book pages as packing material. A book that Helene especially cherishes has arrived, and she leaves it out on a table to just touch and look at all day long. The book with its fine paper and gold-edged pages seems a bit out of place in Helene's tiny apartment, when it should be sitting in the library of some fine estate home. Helene closes and adds a P.S. requesting Sam Pepys' diary in the hopes that it will arrive before winter comes.

Frank's response reassures Helene that he is not ripping up books for packing material. Instead, he uses the pages of those books with missing covers that will never be sold. Frank promises to be on the look out for the Pepys diary.

Letters, 1949 - 1950 Analysis

The author showcases the power of connection in this collection of letters. Despite the geographic and cultural differences, the people in the bookstore form a strong bond with the brash American woman who becomes their customer for twenty years. Looking beyond the immediate requests for books that are the basis of the letters, it is interesting to watch a respectful relationship begin to grow between people of vastly different cultures and experiences.

The love of language and the craft of writing are important to the people on both sides of the Atlantic, and this is the foundation on which the relationship is built. Helene earns a meager living as a script editor, but she yearns for deeper connections and experiences, particularly those found in ancient texts.

Helene also finds a valuable connection in reading the words that many others have read before her and takes mischievous delight in making notes in the margins of library books so that some unknown person will someday find the words that she has written. The sense of history and drama is intriguing to Helene, who lives a very sheltered life in her tiny apartment.

The difference in the cultures becomes evident very quickly. When Helene brashly makes demands of the booksellers, they are reserved and excruciatingly polite in their responses. In most of the letters, Frank is forced to apologize for some lack of perceived inattentiveness or alacrity.

Cecily, not Frank, makes the first attempt to find out more about Helene as a person, not just a customer. Frank's reticence even restricts him from using his name when

signing his initial letters to Helene. This represents an extreme sense of decorum and propriety that Helene both admires and eschews.

Letters, 1951 - 1953

Letters, 1951 - 1953 Summary

Helene's first letter from Frank in 1951 arrives in February, notifying her of the status of some of her requests. Cecily writes a letter to Helene with her own mother's recipe for Yorkshire pudding in answer to Helene's request. Cecily thanks Helene for the tins of food sent the past Christmas and wishes Helene would not spend her hard-earned money on them. Nevertheless, Cecily is pleased to have them and is saving them for her husband's return from his service in the Air Force.

Helene's reply to Cecily indicates a successful venture at making the Yorkshire pudding recipe. Helene also calms Cecily about the expense of the food gifts, which are relatively inexpensive to send. Helen finds it delightful to browse the food company's catalog and make the best selections possible so that the goodies may be divided among the six employees at Marks & Co. Helene has also received a call from a TV producer offering her $200 per week to write scripts for a television show. Helene is cautiously optimistic and is hoping for the best, especially in the jump in income from her $40 per week salary at the present.

In April, Cecily, along with Megan and Bill, two other bookshop employees, write to Helene with appreciation for the Easter package which included fresh meat, for which they are especially grateful. Both young women invite Helene to visit when she comes to England, and Bill offers to send Helene anything she may want from London at any time.

Frank returns from being gone for a couple weeks and writes a letter of thanks to Helene for the Easter package. As a gesture of appreciation, Frank includes a book of Elizabethan love poems in which Helene expressed interest quite awhile ago.

Helene is overwhelmed by the beautiful book and wishes the staff at Marks & Co. would have inscribed their thoughts on the flyleaf instead of a separate card so that their generous gift and thoughts would never be lost. Helene apologizes for America's post-war funding efforts into rebuilding Japan and Germany while letting England fend for itself. Helene hopes to apologize in person one day when she visits England.

One day Helene receives a letter from her friend, Maxine, who is appearing in a theater production in London. Maxine has visited the shop of Marks & Co. and tells her friend about the charming old shop, which looks as if it is "straight out of Dickens." Helene replies to Maxine and half scolds her for browsing "her" bookstore when she herself has never had a chance to visit. Helene is now writing for the TV series "Adventures of Ellery Queen" and asks Maxine to write again with details of life in London.

Helene returns to her irascible self when replying to Frank about the Pepys Diary, which has been cruelly edited. She demands that Frank find a full version. Helene also asks

Frank to take a vote among the shop employees to determine whether they would like fresh eggs or powdered eggs in the Christmas package this year.

With Frank's usual diplomacy, he apologizes for the inadequate Pepys and vows to find a better edition. Frank shares with Helene that he has bought the library of an estate and has secured a few more of the books from her original request. The vote on the Christmas eggs is for fresh. Although powdered eggs would last longer, the book staff craves the taste of a fresh egg in this time of rations.

Helene's sarcasm fires back at Frank in that it took him "only" two years to find the remaining two books from her original request. "You keep going at this rate you're gonna give yourself a heart attack." Helene immediately apologizes for needling Frank and extends her appreciation for his efforts on her behalf over the years. Helene also mentions the upcoming elections and hopes that Churchill is elected so that the rationing situation will improve in England.

Frank reports that Helene's Christmas gift has arrived and that the staff has given the whole box of fresh eggs to Mr. Martin, one of their colleagues who has been sick recently. The tins of tongue and other items are all very welcome and most will be saved for special occasions. The bookshop staff has sent Helene a hand-embroidered linen tablecloth as a Christmas gift, and Frank hopes that Helene will not have to pay a duty tax upon its arrival.

Frank acknowledges Helene's receipt of the tablecloth in the first letter of 1952 and explains that it was crafted by an eighty-year-old woman who is a neighbor in Franks' apartment building. The woman does not normally sell her work, but she was happy to do so in this case.

Not long after this letter, Helene receives her first letter from Frank's wife, Nora, thanking Helene for all the gifts over the past few years. Nora provides the name of the old woman who made the tablecloth, Mrs. Boulton. Nora tells Helene that she trades some of the powdered eggs for nylon stockings, which is not condoned but a necessary practice. Nora also explains that she is Franks' second wife, his first wife having died during the war. Frank and Nora are parents to Frank's twelve-year-old daughter, Sheila, and their own four-year-old daughter, Mary.

About a week later, Helene receives a letter from Mrs. Boulton, who is pleased that Helene likes the linen tablecloth and hopes that Helene will be able to travel to England one day so that they may meet.

Prompted by Nora's need for nylon stockings, Helene writes a letter to Maxine, who is still in London, asking her to take four pairs of stockings to Marks & Co, one pair for each of the women employees. Helene also describes the beauty of the intricately embroidered linen tablecloth she received as a Christmas gift from the bookshop employees. Helene is pleased to have received a $50 per week raise, and her hopes are raised for traveling to England soon.

Helene is in a temperamental mood again and chastises Frank for not sending any books for such a long time. She sarcastically adds one more title to the list of books "you aren't sending me." Helene closes the letter in exasperation by asking Frank, "What do you do with yourself all day, sit in the back of the store and read? Why don't you try selling a book to somebody?" As a postscript, Helene adds that the girls in the store will be receiving stockings soon if all goes well.

Less than a week later, Frank replies that the stockings arrived at the store today and that the girls in the store are thrilled. Frank relays the sad news that Mr. Martin, who had been ill, has died. This loss combined with the death of the King of England has made for a somber mood in the shop these days.

Helene soon receives a letter from Nora thanking her for the continued care packages. Nora also tells Helene that Cecily has left the bookshop in order to be with her husband in Iraq. Nora encloses recent photographs of her family and adds that Sheila hopes that Helene will be able to visit them in England soon.

A few months pass, and Helene receives a Pepys Diary, which especially pleases her. Helene shares with Frank her book cleaning rituals every spring and her aversion to reading best sellers and first editions of any book. Helene tells Frank that she is having some expensive dental work done, which will stall her visit to England in the near future, but she will continue to purchase books.

Letters, 1951 - 1953 Analysis

Throughout these two years, Helene's relationship with the bookshop employees deepens and extends to include other people such as Helene's friend, Maxine, and Franks' wife, Nora, and daughter, Sheila, and their neighbor, Mrs. Boulton. The life events of these people are shared as if they are old friends, even though they have never met or even spoken on the phone. The craft of the written word and a respect for readers and writers remains a strong bond.

Helene borders on rudeness in some of her exchanges with Frank and seems a bit self-absorbed and driven by her own needs. However, Helene's generosity is welcomed by the shop employees time and time again, and her extension of herself and compassion is the major influence of the ongoing relationships.

Historically, England was suffering widespread rationing due to governmental initiatives to economize, which limited the food and other items available to citizens at the time. In addition to these deprivations, English citizens were also suffering because government funding was backing military rebuilding after the war in anticipation of a conflict in Korea.

Helene mentions in one of her letters about the inequity of the United States supplementing the post-World War II rebuilding efforts in Japan and Germany while neglecting England, which shows her sympathy for her friends and her inability to help them to any major degree.

Letters, 1953 - 1969

Letters, 1953 - 1969 Summary

Helene has sent a celebration package to the bookshop in time for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, and Frank acknowledges her generosity. A few months later, Cecily writes a preemptive letter to Helene telling her that it is not necessary to send anything to the shop for Christmas this year, as rations have ceased and the acquisition of food and other items is much easier. Cecily would prefer that Helene save her money for a trip to England, but she asks that Helene wait until 1955 when she and her husband will be back from his tour of military duty in the Persian Gulf.

In early fall of 1955, Helene chastises Frank for publishing a book catalog for many years and sending the first one to her just this year. On a lighter note, Helene jokingly asks for prayers for the Brooklyn Dodgers playing in the World Series this year.

Christmas is near when Frank replies with the status of Helene's most recent inquiries. He tells Helene that Megan is considering moving to South Africa and that there is no word from Cecily in the Gulf. Frank promises to back the Brooklyn Dodgers in exchange for Helen's support of the Tottenham Hotspurs Football Club, a local sports team.

After Christmas in 1956, Helene writes to Frank that she is saving money faithfully and hopes to travel to England in the summer of 1957 to see all the British icons and institutions including Mrs. Boulton.

Three months pass before Frank is able to reply with two books Helene has requested. Frank and his staff and family are all happy about the possibility of Helene's visit next summer. Frank extends hospitality at his home at any time that Helene can come.

In the middle of the summer of 1956, Helene is evicted from her apartment because the owner is making major renovations. Helene has secured a new apartment and is buying furniture and carpets, which are depleting her England travel funds, but she is pleased at the prospect in having a nice home in which to work and relax.

Frank does not write again until May of 1957. He tells Helene that he has acquired three more books that Helene has requested. Frank relates the increase in tourism, especially Americans, and hopes that Helene can come next year.

In January of 1958, Helene writes to Frank to chastise him that his Christmas card was sent to her old address. Helene bemoans the lack of respect for the English language as exhibited in television commercials and signage which accost her sensibilities every day.

Frank delays a response until March because Nora has been hospitalized, but she is expected to return home soon. As he closes his letter, Frank apologizes for having sent the Christmas card to the incorrect address.

A couple of months later, Nora writes to Helene and expresses her wish that she and Frank owned their own bookshop so that they could send her gifts in appreciation for all her kindnesses over the years. Nora encloses recent photographs of the family and apologizes for her choppy writing style, telling Helene how Frank chastises her for her lack of eloquence on paper.

After a gap of almost a year, Helene writes to Frank to tell him that the television series for which she writes is moving to Southern California and that she will lose her job because of her preference to remain in New York.

A few months later, Helene is able to report that she has received a five-thousand-dollar grant from CBS to write scripts for a series of American history programs. Helene's first project covers the British occupation of New York from 1776 through 1783, and she jokingly tells Frank that "I marvel at how I rise above it to address you in friendly and forgiving fashion, your behavior over here from 1776 to 1783 was simply filthy."

In February of 1961, Helene reports that she has work again, as she is writing magazine articles. Although she enjoys the work, the income is not great, and she is not able to purchase books at the present. Helene shares with Frank how all the English literature and history she has absorbed have seeped into her current work, and her editor does not understand her sometimes. It is a comfort to Helene to know that Frank shares her passion for old books.

The next letter from Frank arrives in October of 1963. He says that Sheila has quit her secretarial job in order to attend college to become a teacher. By March of 1964, Helene is writing children's history books and places a request with Frank for a friend who would like to complete a collection of George Bernard Shaw's works. Helene closes her letter by asking about Cecily and Megan, to which Frank replies a month later that Megan did not stay long in South Africa and moved to Australia and that there has been no word from Cecily for years.

Frank's next letter to Helene in October of 1965 sends his and Nora's love and shares the increase in tourism due to the popularity of Carnaby Street and the Beatles, whom Frank would like more if the fans were not so noisy. In September of 1968, Helene writes to Frank about her inactivity of purchasing books, as she is consumed with American history at the present and expects that there are not too many versions available in England.

Helene receives a shock with the arrival of a letter from the secretary of Marks & Co., who informs Helene that Frank died on December 22, 1968. Unfortunately, Frank did not recover from a ruptured appendix and succumbed from peritonitis as a result. Nora writes to Helene in January of 1969, thanking Helene for her kind sympathy and wishing that Helene had had a chance to meet Frank. Nora admits to a little bit of jealousy over Helene's letter-writing relationship with Frank over the years. Nora knows that she is not a writer and was always envious of Helene's ability to express herself.

In the following October, Helene receives a letter from Frank and Nora's daughter, Sheila, giving Helene permission to publish the correspondence between Helene and Frank in a book.

Letters, 1953 - 1969 Analysis

The exchange of letters is a small documentary of events in American and British popular culture. Helene mentions the Brooklyn Dodgers and the World Series, and Frank writes about the phenomenon surrounding Carnaby Street and the Beatles in the early 1960s. It is almost as if these current events are annoyances to these two antique book lovers, consumed with the past.

Regrettably, Helene never has a chance to meet Frank, but she feels the loss at his death because of the scope of their friendship. The always planned and never taken trip to England to visit "her" bookstore becomes a poignant regret with Frank's death. From a literary technique standpoint, Frank serves as the foil to Helene's irascibility, but in terms of human interactions, the two people were simply friends who deeply respected each other.

Characters

Frank Doel

A consummate salesperson, Frank Doel is knowledgeable to a fault on the vast array of books available at Marks & Co. and elsewhere, demonstrating a keen awareness of possible works of interest to Helene and of their availability and care. Upon his death, his wife Nora speaks of many in the book trade who felt Frank was knowledgeable and "imparted his knowledge with kindness to all and sundry."

Mentioned in the beginning only as "FPD," the efficient, polite reserve of Frank Doel softens over years of correspondence with Helene. In a later, decidedly more personal letter, Frank addresses the letter "Dear Helene," pointing out in parentheses no less, that he does not care about the files anymore and goes on to share freely with Helene on a deeper level."

His importance in the novel in relation to Helene cannot be under-emphasized. Frank undisputedly shares Helene's love of books and it is in this obvious reverence for the medium as well as his job as a bookseller that he quickly becomes Helene's champion. Demonstrating patience, kindness and understanding only draws Helene out more and in this way she forms a dependence on Frank she may not so easily find in relations with others.

Nora Doel

Loving, devoted, supportive wife and mother, Nora Doel corresponds with Helene in light of the kindness bestowed upon Nora's husband Frank and those employed by Marks & Co. She is somewhat timid in her reserve, writing Helene only after having found the perfect excuse to do so: providing the name and address of a woman Helene wishes to contact. Nora also shares the difficulties both herself, and by extension, the members of Helene's extended family at Marks & Co., are encountering in obtaining basic goods. When Nora expresses the value of a tin of eggs in procuring a pair of women's hose, or the rare sight of meat at the London market, for example, Helene sees and responds to not only the needs of Nora for such items but to those of the bookstore. Decidedly less articulate than Frank or Helene, her curiosity about her husband's female customer becomes obvious by the end of the story. She admits that she was very jealous of Helene "as Frank enjoyed [Helene's] letters and they or some were so like his sense of humor." Nora also acknowledges similar feelings regarding Helene's writing ability.

It is with equal candor that Nora shares the source of her insecurities with her husband's correspondent. She describes her husband and herself as a pair of extreme opposites: "he so kind and gentle and me with my Irish background always fighting for my rights." In this manner Nora functions in the play to round out Frank as a character on a more

personal level. She shares intimate details about her husband, his family, and home life as well as his character quirks. Through Nora it is revealed that Frank is the father of three daughters, a "ready made" daughter from his first relationship and two from his union with Nora. She also provides snapshots of Frank to Helene, sharing her husband's need to put a good foot forward with Helene as expressed by his dissatisfaction for the photos. "Frank says none of them do him justice, he is much better looking," says Nora of the pictures.

Cecily Farr

The first Marks & Co. employee outside of Frank Doel to attempt to correspond with Helene, daring Cecily Farr does so without what she feels is the necessary permission, and in a much more intimate and personal way than Frank. Cecily's letters reflect her young, vibrant enthusiasm; in anticipating Helene's curiosity she mirrors her own. She shares with Helene intimate details of a personal life yet to be disclosed by Frank, preempting her description with "if you're curious about Frank," then providing information about his marital status and his looks. Of her own curiosity, Cecily admits, "I've been dying to slip in a little note and [Frank] might not think it quite proper of me." A military wife, Cecily remains a correspondent of Helene's until Cecily joins her husband on a military base in Iraq.

Helene Hanff

Eccentric and reclusive Helene Hanff, known as h.h. by her closest friends, is a bibliomaniac (a person with a preoccupation for acquiring and owning books) and looks to Marks & Co. to satisfy her habit. Professor Quiller Couch, or "Q," is responsible for Helene's obsession. When describing herself to Cecily, Helene remarks that she is "so unstudious she never went to college," and claims she is "about as smart-looking as a Broadway panhandler."

In expressing her desire for certain reading materials, she is often childish in her demands though she feigns humor or claims to press the bookseller in jest, despite the obvious effects such demands may have on Frank. "Poor Frank, I give him such a hard time, I'm always bawling him out for something," says Helene. Claiming to be "only teasing," she still knows Frank will take her seriously. She further shares, "I keep trying to puncture that proper British reserve, if he gets ulcers I did it." Her concern is apparent by the nature of her comment, one she apparently wishes will reach the ears of Frank, the target of her sarcasm.

Helene's behavior towards Frank, as expressed in her communications, is not a function of her own self-absorption, but rather her obsessive need to surround herself with books. Books are a means of self-expression, and their appearance and contents also serve to soothe her. Because they are such an entrenched part of her life, the books seem to take on lives of their own, as personified in the text of her letters. When a book by M. De Tocqueville arrives, Helene refers to the author's words and work in a letter to

Frank, stating, "he sits around looking smug because everything he said is true," as regards her feelings of politics in America.

As demanding as Helene may be, she is also quite generous and kind, and receptive to the warmth of strangers as expressed in her correspondence to others involved directly with Marks & Co. She openly shares with Cecily her less-than-glamorous lifestyle in New York, devoid of the romantic notions Cecily offers. In another moment, a letter from Nora inspires a perceptive Helene to send several pairs of nylons not only to Frank's wife, but to the other women at the shop, in response to the hardships rationing presents Nora and the others. In the same letter, the reader discovers via Nora's letter that Helene has inquired after the address of a woman in an effort to express her thanks for a tablecloth.

The author has her eccentricities, however, and they tend to come out particularly in her love of classic books. Helene fancies herself to be a *Miniver Cheevy,* a character in a poem who distrusts anything modern in favor of more chivalrous moments in history, when knights defended castles and princes married princesses. Her struggle with change comes out in some particularly telling moments, when she expresses angst over one work or another's technical merits. She devotes an entire letter to Frank, for example, on the problem inherent in combining the works of John Donne and William Blake into one text, a discovery with nightmarish possibilities in her eyes. These and other impressions give the text its thematic underpinning.

Bill Humphries

An associate at Marks & Co., Bill Humphries is mentioned throughout the text and actually corresponds with Helene from time to time in a show of appreciation for her generosity.

Maxine

Maxine, or Maxie as she is addressed in letters to her friend, is Helene's close friend and confidant. By the nature of their correspondence, it is assumed that the reader is able to get a clearer glimpse of Helene's true nature. It is with Maxine that Helene shares her insecurities concerning a trip to London. It is also Maxine who becomes Helene's eyes and ears on a trip to see the writer's friends at Charing Cross road. The main function of the character is to illuminate a side of Helene not apparent in her communications with others, thus giving such communications the added dimension needed to put them into a richer context.

Themes

Language and Meaning

The premise of the work is that through select letters the author is able to construct the story of the deep relationship forged between herself and the bookseller she has come to know on both a professional and personal level. Therefore, the idea of communication as a deep personal expression is a key factor in discovering the story behind the correspondence. There is a meaning behind the language that gives the story its emotive power.

Nora, for example, admits she is a terrible writer, and by her admission has realized some meaning is lost in the text of her letters. In contrast, language and meaning forge the bond between Frank and Helene. It is the glue keeping their relationship together, so powerful that Helene is afraid to actually meet Frank and others in person for fear of losing the credibility and power she has forged in writing. By way of literary illusion as well as writing ability, Helene connects with Frank in a way others, like Nora, may not.

In a letter to Frank, Helene also demonstrates the significance words carry. In looking for an apartment she discovers what she considers to be distasteful violations of the English language. "Rents do not make sense," she states, "and prices do not sit around being reasonable." She concludes that she goes through life "watching the English language being raped before me face." In this instance and others, she also uses a literary reference to Edward Arlington Robinson to express her feelings of dismay.

Beginning and Ending

The work is based on a series of letters, and therefore, on beginnings and endings. The events of the story are recalled in relational time, either in response letters preceding letters, or as historical documents by date. The beginnings and endings are made implicit in specific life events or transitions, marked by career, personal relationship, environment, or history.

For example, when Cecily instructs Helene to stop sending care packages because "everything is now off rations and even nylons are available in all the better shops," it is safe to assume that London has made a transition for the better. Likewise when Frank reports to Helene he has lost touch with Cecily, the reader knows it marks the end of any subsequent communication between Cecily and Helene.

On a more tragic note, the death of Frank marks the end of many things for Helene—including a long friendship and her plans to visit England—and the beginning of others. Helene has managed to put together a book of correspondence for publication, and in so doing has sparked a relationship with one of Frank's daughters.

Lack and Sufficiency

Through communication of their needs and wants, the characters explore the idea of lack verses sufficiency. Often times the communication is subtle, a hint or request rather than a demand for something, or may simply be the author's personal expression of a sense of deprivation. Such expressions set the tone for the work in terms of both history and characterization. As characters make their needs and wants known, the reader is able to make value judgments on the personalities represented in the work.

When Helene does not get a response to her letter of inquiry, or does not receive a particular book she has requested, her responses are impetuous or fueled by sudden energy, action, or emotion, suggesting impulsiveness, impatience, or thoughtlessness of character. Telling Frank it will be a long, cold winter, she suddenly exclaims, "and I need reading matter, now don't start sitting around, go find me some books."

Other expressions of lack and sufficiency serve as historical records of postwar London. After sending care parcels of meat and dried egg, for example, Helene is informed by Nora that a bit of dried egg is valuable in an exchange for pantyhose. In consequence, Helene responds to Nora's need for female accessories by supplying not only Nora, but three other women in the shop, with nylon hose.

Appearances and Reality

Letter writing is based somewhat on artifice; it is an expression of self on paper, a persona that leaves much white space to imagine the person behind the words, their appearance, their personality, and their life. The characters of the novel are able to summon imagination, to express themselves with reserve or candor, leaving very strong, lasting impressions of people they would fancy themselves to be in a personal encounter.

Cecily first contacts Helene because her curiosity about the writer—how she looks and so forth—has peaked her interest to the degree that any consequence due to such contact is mitigated by a sheer need to satisfy her imagination. When Nora writes Helene, she encloses carefully selected photos of her husband, but is quick to point out Frank's displeasure with the way he appears in them. In another instance, when Helene complains of neglect from Frank and others at the bookseller, she is often surprised with news of a death or illness, and dismisses her notions that the store was intentionally choosing to overlook her.

Finally, it is Helene's anticipated trip to London that figures prominently in the work. She shares in several instances that she prefers her writing persona, believing that what looks good on paper would not become reality in a personal encounter with her friends at the bookseller. Admitting the comfort she finds in her long distance relationship, she tells Maxine all may be compromised otherwise. For Helene, writing letters from 3,000 miles away is safe. Imagining a trip to the bookseller, she adds, "I'll probably walk in there one day and walk right out again without telling them who I am."

Style

Antihero

The central character in the work, Helene, lacks traditional heroic qualities, particularly courage and personal fortitude. Although she provides the employees at Marks & Co. with some wonderful gifts, such presents do come with a bit of a price, particularly for Frank. When Helene is slow to receive a book, she often becomes demanding and temperamental with him. Although she admits to Cecily she is joking with Frank, she also owns up to the idea that he may take her seriously regardless of her intentions, and her joking becomes part of such demands by design. She also embraces her eccentricities, sharing she wears moth-eaten sweaters and wool slacks in reaction to her ill-heated "hovel" of an apartment. Most apparent, however, is her view of the world, which seems to be shaped in large part by the books in which she is interested. Helene favors classic works over contemporary ones, a tendency in sync with her view of the world. At one point, for example, she concurs with a poet in reaction to her editor, who becomes agitated with her interest in old English books. In response, she recites a passage from Edward Arlington Robinson's *Miniver Cheevy,* identifying with another antihero who shuns modernity in favor of "the days of old."

Chronicle

The text unfolds in a series of letters acting as a record of the events occurring in the lives of both Helene and those characters related to Marks & Co. The action unfolds chronologically by individually dated letter rather than by event. For example, when Helene complains of neglect to Frank, it is only in his response to her letter that she discovers Nora has been sick and in need of Frank's attention. The letters also serve somewhat as a twenty-year historical chronicle, from 1949 to 1969. As a result, the reader becomes privy to such information as the impact of rations on postwar London, the re-election of Winston Churchill in 1951, the Brooklyn Dodger's bid for the 1955 World Series, and the 1960 U.S. presidential campaign.

Motif

The recurring motif (image or theme) that occurs throughout the text is Helene's repeated request for used books. Although she forges deep bonds with those working at Marks & Co., Helene's overriding desire is to find a particular published work; all of her correspondence, apart from some personal bits of information here and there, is related to this endeavor. This device is used to demonstrate the strong relationship Helene has formed with books, and by extension, the written word. Her need for books brings her closer to the employees of Marks & Co. Books also form the basis for both work and recreation for Helene. The book motif is also exemplified in the foundation of the story: a collection of letters Helene has been given permission to put in book form.

Historical Context

Churchill's Conservative Government

In 1951 Winston Churchill succeeded Clement Attlee as prime minister, signaling an end to the Labor government and a victory for the Conservatives. The new leader immediately asserted England's need to economize on foreign spending, including restrictions on food and British tourism. In Hanff's work, for example, the value of receiving a food parcel of meat from Helene was enormous, with the imposed meat ration set at less than twenty cents per person per week. At the same time, both the Labor government and the Conservative government pushed for increased arms spending in the billions, in reaction to both the Korean campaign and a perceived threat of communism.

Two international disputes figured prominently in British politics. The first was with Iran, when the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was expelled from Iran in 1951, resulting in a blatant breach of contract. The company owned the largest oil refinery in the world on the Persian Gulf, with the British government holding a controlling interest. This conflict between nations explains character Cecily's move to the Persian Gulf to be with her husband, a member of the military stationed there. Another conflict arose with Egypt over its attempts to force the country out of the Suez Canal zone and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. With forty-four percent ownership of the canal's French operating company, the British refused to budge, believing the region would be of great strategic import in a conflict with the Soviets.

Churchill had many political objectives in 1951, including the denationalization of the steel industry in response to an overwhelming public outcry. The government was also active in the affairs of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, an anti-communist military alliance formed by eleven Western nations, including the United States.

Baseball in America

When Helene asks Frank to root for the Brooklyn Dodgers, she is responding to a banner year for the team in 1955, when that October they earned baseball's highest honor by winning the World Series, while also defeating their rivals, the New York Yankees. The Dodgers had previously won the National League pennant seven times without going on to win the Series; hence the Brooklyn adage, "wait till next year." The 1955 Series went the full seven games before the Brooklyn victory became a reality.

During 1955 major league baseball experienced an overall increase in attendance of 688,265 people. With respect to the American League, Milwaukee was the clear leader in attendance, attracting a crowd of 2,005,836 fans in 1955. American League highlights for 1955 included outstanding performances by Mickey Mantle, hitting thirty-seven homeruns for the year, and Al Kaline, the Detroit Tiger outfielder, who at twenty years of

age become the youngest player ever to win a batting championship, with a .340 average that year.

The Democratic Comeback

"I belong to a Democratic club," says Helene, "[I] read a couple of newspaper stories about the presidential hopefuls—Stevenson, Humphrey, Kennedy, Stassen, Nixon." In 1959 the Democrats came up with an elaborate plan to take control of the White House from the Republican Party. Four U.S. Senators were considered chief contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination, including John F. Kennedy, Hubert H. Humphrey, Stuart Symington, and Lyndon B. Johnson. Adlai E. Stevenson was also favored but personally rejected the idea. Of all of the candidates, John F. Kennedy would realize the greatest success. He spoke of his Catholicism openly and felt the subject of religion in general a

target for political debate. He also won the support of many with his views on labor-reform legislation. Both factors were cited as contributing to his successful victory against Eisenhower in 1960.

The Feminine Mystique

Women of the early 1960s were experiencing burgeoning intellectual liberation on college campuses across America, and from this time of great expansion in the feminist movement came the work of freelance magazine journalist Betty Friedan. Her work was born out of her research of former Smith College classmates, to whom Friedan sent questionnaires to follow-up on their post-college lives. What she discovered was that these middle- and upper-middle-class women were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the role for which society had typecast them, that of wife and mother. Friedan called these women victims of the "feminine mystique," or the belief that for a woman to step outside of the role of

wife and mother was unnatural, if not dangerous. The book opened up a realm of possibilities for women, who up until this point had been afraid to voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo. The popularity of the book was only part of Friedan's contribution to the feminist movement. In 1966 the author founded the National Organization for Women (NOW).

Critical Overview

84, Charing Cross Road is the best-known of Hanff's four titles published specifically for an adult audience. The work exemplifies an economic and literate prose style, Hanff's hallmarks that have been traditionally celebrated by critics. Many critics, however, find the appeal of Hanff's memoir to be a function of its Victorian charm. For example, Thomas Lask, in a *New York Times* review, praised the work for its nineteenth-century response to the encroachments of a twentieth-century computerized society. Lask adds that the book is "an emollient for the spirit and the sheath for the exposed nerve." Other critics cite Hanff's keen sense of wit as a contributing factor to the success of the text; a quality recognized consistently by critics with respect to her other works.

84, Charing Cross Road gained critical acclaim and was subsequently adapted for film, television, and the stage. Stanley Kauffman's review in the *New Republic* did not give these adaptations high marks, however. Calling Hanff's work "a hopeless candidate for the screen," Kauffman believes it to be "almost equally hopeless for the stage," although already dramatized by James Roose Evans. The problems Kaufmann cites with the work relate to the medium in which they are presented: a series of letters. Kaufmann's concern is that much has to be inferred from the white space of this collection of correspondence in order to create a more cohesive work, thus the work runs the risk of creative compromise in adaptations.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kryhoski is currently working as a freelance writer. She has taught English literature in addition to English as a second language overseas. In this essay, Kryhoski considers some of the ambiguities inherent in a literary work constructed solely from Hanff's personal correspondence.

Critics have commented on the elusiveness of the text of *84, Charing Cross Road* in its translation onto screen or stage. What makes the work particularly beguiling for the reader (and for the screenwriter or playwright) is the ambiguous characterization of Helene and others, as well as of the specific events of the text, as influenced by its presentation as a bundle of letters. The choppiness of the correspondence leaves more open to interpretation than would the structure of a more traditional novel. Considering the inconsistencies in Helene's character, as well as the overall structure of the work, it is easy to see the story's power to stir the reader's imagination. Subsequently, there is a danger inherent in accepting any one interpretation of the work, or in assuming that it is conclusively a true representation of the author's life.

The characterization of Helene is ambiguous at best. At the outset of the novel, her correspondence is polite enough, witty enough, and acceptable enough to be considered well within the norm of letter-writing etiquette. As time goes on, however, Helene's demeanor changes, giving the impression that one is seeing a side of the writer that is more intimate and therefore more accurate than that which has been previously observed. In the first few months of correspondence with Frank, Helene is congenial in her request to Frank to translate his prices for her on specific items in an effort to pay him properly. Conscious of the slight burden she puts on Frank, Helene explains, "I don't add too well in plain American, I haven't a prayer of ever mastering bilingual arithmetic." She also closes the letter rather wittily, writing of Frank's last letter (in which he addressed her as "Dear Madam"): "I hope that 'madam' doesn't mean over there what it does over here."

In just a month's time, however, Helene's tone has completely changed, although Frank Doel's has not. Responding to his professional reserve, Helene fires at him of her latest purchase, exclaiming, "What kind of a black protestant Bible is this?" She insults the Church of England, claiming that they have "loused up the most beautiful prose ever written." Simply stating "the hell with it," Helene finally concedes to the idea of using her Latin teacher's Vulgate until Frank can find her a suitable copy. The writer comes off as a loose canon in her rather dramatic reaction to the receipt of an unwanted book. This response is particularly surprising because of the seeming liberties Helene takes with the bookseller in a relatively short time, such that her relationship with Marks & Co. might be jeopardized. From previous letters, the frazzled response of the writer is based solely on what seems to be an absurd dependence on books rather than on any prior experience with Frank. She has no reason to believe her request will go unheard, that the bookseller will be less than sympathetic to her plight, or that Frank will not satisfactorily address the problem.

The reader's assumptions of Helene based on this response could indeed be shortsighted. The tenor of further responses seem to be fairly consistent with the outburst in which Helene engages early in the story, a knife-edged sort of moodiness indicative of someone prone to temperamental flares. However, her correspondence with other members of Marks & Co. bear witness to a different image of Helene, that of the witty prankster. She does not react to Cecily's intrusion into her personal life in the same manner she does with Frank's seemingly harmless mistakes, but is instead chummy in her conversations with the inquisitive Marks & Co. employee. Helene willingly offers details about her life, such as her unflattering appearance, her occupation, and her living space. She is particularly pointed in sharing her feelings for Frank. Relating to Cecily the heap of abuse directed at him, Helene tells her that she purposely gives Frank a difficult time of it. "I'm always bawling him out for something," Helene says, "I'm only teasing, but I know he'll take me seriously. I keep trying to puncture that proper British reserve, if he gets ulcers I did it.

In this light, Helene knowingly tells Cecily of her pranks with Frank with the intention of reaching him. Cecily cannot help but be in the thick of things, and Helene is banking on this fact. She realizes that Frank may eventually be put off by her impetuousness or impulsive outbursts expressed in her letters. But at some point one wonders as to the sincerity of the admission. Based on subsequent responses, it is as if Helene is seeking permission to continue behaving in what she knows to be an unacceptable fashion, without regard for Frank. Although this may seem a bit thin-skinned a view—and although Frank seems to take subsequent outbursts in the true spirit one is to assume, at least according to Helene, that they are given—there is still an edge to her correspondence that creates an interesting picture of the author. She continually makes childish demands of Frank, of his time, and duly responds to disappointment with a flare for the dramatic. But what seems to be behind such behavior is her obsession with the written word, particularly fitting for a writer whose profession puts a great value on wordsmiths. For instance, Helene devotes an entire letter to Frank on the merits of her latest acquisition, a "Giant Modern Library book." Her discourse on the subject continues for a page or two, at one point pleading with Frank for help, concluding with her retirement to bed, where she will "have hideous nightmares involving huge monsters in academic robes carrying long bloody butcher knives labeled Excerpt, Selection, Passage and Abridged."

What seems to be painfully clear is that the narrator is perhaps unreliable in her perceptions. Wit seems to walk a fine line with the author's bibliomania, or obsessive book-collecting habits. Her concerns for the future can be taken as a humorous affront or the product of deeper insecurities. But all are hard to infer with any certainty, even by the text's conclusion. Correspondence with Maxine reveals yet another dimension to the communication between Frank, his coworkers at Marks & Co., and Helene. Helene candidly admits to Maxine her fear of meeting her friends at Charing Cross Road based on the persona she has put forward in her letters. Stating that she may not "have the nerve," Helene shares that she writes considerably more outrageous letters than she would if it were not for the safety of a 3,000 mile expanse between New York and London. "I'll probably walk in there one day and walk right out again without telling them who I am," claims Helene.

This is where Helene makes an impact on her audience at Marks & Co., and by extension, her world. She admittedly hides behind the elusiveness of letter writing to avoid intimate contact with those at the bookseller, making empty promises that she will indeed visit London. Yet the reader is privy early on to information that she will not make the trip. Who is to say the reliability of the text, by extension, is not consistent with Helene's own behavior and characterization of herself and the events around her? To say, then, that the author truly opens her life up to interpretation is subjective at best. The omission of various letters is intimated in the sparseness of the collection during specific time periods, and by the choppy progression of letters, noted in the intentional omission of responses logically linking one to the next. In this regard the work becomes truly one of fiction, based mainly on inferences of the reader as to particular details of the text. Relying on these letters, then, the reader finds him- or herself on a slippery slope, blindly relying on the discourse of an unreliable narrator.

Structurally the work also lends itself to various interpretations. Letters are rather temporary documents, momentary recollections suspended in time that may or may not truly reflect the writer behind them. A skilled writer may actually make their presence felt within the context of the correspondence. There is inherent danger, however, in guessing the nature of a person or a particular event or events based solely on such correspondence. Nora aptly demonstrates this to Helene, admitting she does not put the most impressive foot forward in her correspondence due to rather poor writing ability. Personality, then, is lost in the translation, as is additional information about the lives of the characters occurring in the white space of the work. The white space referred to in literature is that open or blank expanse created by gaps in time and plot unaccounted for by the text, literally the blank page. It is in this space that one must infer or make connections in the text as to the motivations of specific characters, or the impact of particular events on the story. The packaging by the author of a bundle of letters leaves quite a bit to the reader in terms of interpretation. Considering the task, it is understandable that critics the likes of Stanley Kauffman have pondered the logistics of the text only to conclude that the work does not lend itself to adaptation for stage or screen.

It is a work based purely on perceptions rather being driven by plot. To try to translate any one reader's experience with the text into another form, then, to universalize the experience for the reader, is perhaps doing both Hanff and the fans of *84, Charing Cross Road* a great disservice. The power of the work lies within the imagination of the reader who happens on it at a particular moment. This idea seems to gel quite well with Helene Hanff's own feelings on London travel. She shares aptly, "I remember years ago a guy I knew told me that people going to England find exactly what they go looking for." Of the existence of the England of English literature, the author concludes, "Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Looking around the rug one thing's for sure: it's here."

Source: Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on *84, Charing Cross Road,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Piano is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Bowling Green State University. In the following essay, Piano explores a writer's emotional and intellectual attachment to books as represented by her correspondence to a bookseller at an antiquarian bookshop in London.

Published in 1970, *84, Charing Cross Road* by writer Helene Hanff is an unusual memoir that reveals the author's love not only of books but also her passion for letter writing and, on a deeper note, human communication. The story centers around a series of letters written by Helene Hanff, a New York writer, to the bookseller Frank Doel, who works at the antiquarian bookstore Marks & Co., located for many years at 84, Charing Cross Road in central London. Beginning in 1949, the letters cover twenty years of correspondence, ending in 1969 with the death of Frank Doel, who has over the years provided Helene with an extraordinary number of used books ranging from the Socratic dialogues to nineteenth-century classics like *Pride and Prejudice.* Yet more than simply a business exchange or monetary transaction, the correspondence between Helene Hanff and Frank Doel shows how cultural difference and geographic distance cannot inhibit friendships from developing, particularly when both correspondents share a love of books. In addition, their trans-Atlantic friendship can be seen as a continuance of the congenial relations forged during World War II between the United States and Great Britain.

84, Charing Cross Road is made up of a series of letters in chronological order that convey a deepening intimacy and affection between the two main correspondents, Helene Hanff and Frank Doel. What is most striking while reading the letters is how very different these two people are. Right at the onset of their correspondence, the reader gets an immediate sense of two very different personalities emerging. On the one hand, Helene is direct, personal, and expressive. Her humor surfaces in the second letter where she writes as an afterward, "I hope 'madam' doesn't mean over there what it does here," referring to Frank's form of address despite Helene signing her name "Helene Hanff (Miss)." Although very little detail is given in terms of physical description, class background, or education, the reader is able to envision Helene as a typical New Yorker. She is quick to speak (or write) her mind about the books she is receiving, whether it is praising the beauty and condition of the books or castigating their contents. For example, in the letter dated November 18, 1949, she begins her letter with a question in capital letters, "WHAT KIND OF A BLACK PROTESTANT BIBLE IS THIS?," thus revealing her dismay at receiving a bible that does not meet her expectations. Whereas Helene's letters are often emotive, her outrage usually conveyed through the use of capital letters, Frank's letters are formal and direct, practically to the point of being anonymous and impersonal. This anonymity is seen in the way he signs his letters using his initials, FPD. From the tone of his letters, he is acting as one who conducts business should act, which is polite but distant. One can imagine Frank being quite alarmed at receiving some of Helene's letters, yet his responses hardly ever reveal that she has said something that may offend. He is the quintessential British gentleman, or at least he seems to be.

Although Helene Hanff and Frank Doel could not be more dissimilar, Helene's warm abrasive wit and generosity eventually breaks down the cool exterior that Doel exudes at the beginning of their correspondence. Her references to dental work, her badgering comments to Frank for not doing his job, and her joy at receiving books she loves all contribute to establishing a more intimate relationship not only with Frank but also with many of the staffers at the bookstore. Even more so, Helene's generosity in sending care packages reveals a sensitivity to the conditions of post-WWII England. Because a good portion of the letters are written when England's population was on government food rations and where basic goods like eggs were a luxury, affordable only to the most economically well-off, Helene's care packages make her a hit among the staff and Frank Doel's family. In fact, after she sends the staff a ham for Christmas in 1949, Frank begins to sign his name Frank Doel instead of FPD. Other staff members also then begin to write her letters. Her correspondence eventually extends to Frank's wife and later, when they are grown, to his children. In these letters, Helene is able to get a more in-depth portrait of Frank as well as the England that he represents to her.

In return for the gifts of hosiery and foodstuffs, Helene receives a number of beautiful antiquarian books and a handmade Irish linen tablecloth made by a neighbor of Frank's. In addition, Helene is offered free room and board whenever she decides to visit England by both the Doel family and others at Marks & Co. This cultural exchange reveals on a more personal scale the ties that have developed between Great Britain and the United States and contributes in a small way to the rebuilding of England's infrastructure, many of its cities having been destroyed by German bombing campaigns. As Helene herself notes in a letter to the whole staff, "I send you greetings from America—faithless friend that she is, pouring millions into rebuilding Japan and Germany while letting England starve." Thus, these gifts are an extension of her personal investment in English culture, especially its literature.

Even more than being war allies, it is Helene's love of books and passion for Western literature that fuels her passion for maintaining relations with people she has not met. The correspondence, while divulging personal information, especially in Helene's letters, is primarily focused on keeping Helene well-stocked in many of the canonical works of literature and more obscure items such as musical scores. Her references to reading and receiving books from Marks & Co. take up a good portion of the contents of her letters. In her brash demands for books to be hunted down is a zest for reading great literature. In fact, her drive to acquire quality books is a way for her to develop a repartee with Frank. A letter, dated February 9, 1952, is a particularly noteworthy example of not only her desire to read the literary classics especially when they are bound in beautifully made books, but also her reliance on Frank to find what she is searching for. Addressed to "SLOTH," the letter reveals Helene's despair of not having anything substantive to read. "I could ROT over here before you'd send me anything to read. i oughtta run straight down to brentano's which i would if anything i wanted was in print." She ends the letter, "MISS Hanff to you. (I'm Helene only to my FRIENDS)," acknowledging not only Frank's inability to fill her book requests but also his unceasing formality, even after three years of correspondence and the many care packages she has sent.

Moreover, by reading books by England's finest writers and being in touch with the staff at Marks & Co., Helene begins to envision an England that most likely exists only in her imagination. Despite her many letters that claim she will be in England soon, Helene never ends up going. On the surface, it seems like a monetary problem. As a struggling writer, Helene's income is unpredictable, and what she does earn seems to go to her dentist. Later, after she begins making more money, she moves into a bigger and better flat. Yet, as the years go by, there seems to be something else more at stake in her not going. By the end of the correspondence, it is evident that Helene will never go. Physically being there is impertinent as for the past twenty years Helene has been imagining England through the books she has. As she says in her last letter dated April 11, 1969,

> years ago a guy I knew told me that people going to England find exactly what they go looking for. I said I'd go looking for the England of English literature, and he nodded and said, 'It's there.' Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. Looking around the rug one thing's for sure: it's here.

For Helen, 84, Charing Cross Road is part of a world that she prefers to keep isolated from the material world of actual people and places. Instead, the bookshop and its occupants is contained within the books she buys as well as a product of her imagination.

In the end, *84, Charing Cross Road* is an homage to a place never visited and people never seen, only imagined. In her letters, Helene's passion for reading spills over to her passion for all things British that results in making deep connections to a number of people from Frank Doel to his fellow workers and family. It is not surprising that Frank's wife, Nora, writes Helene about her husband passing away since they have exchanged letters as well as gifts over the years. Nora even admits that she has been jealous of Helene because "Frank so enjoyed your letters and they or some were so like his sense of humour." Thus, she makes clear that two people who appear to be so different on the surface are actually quite similar. Although Helene will probably never make it to England, she realizes that she does not need to go to wonder at its marvels. Rather, the marvels are imbedded in both her memory and the books she has received over the years.

Source: Doreen Piano, Critical Essay on *84, Charing Cross Road,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following interview, Steinberg discusses with Hanff her method of self-education and the impact of writing in her life.

The frustrated actress in Helene Hanff, well documented in her autobiographical chronicles: *84, Charing Cross Road*, *The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*, *Underfoot in Show Business*, and in her latest work, *Q's Legacy*, out this month from Little, Brown (Fiction Forecasts, June 14), gives a bravura performance to raise the curtain on our interview. A pixie with moxie, Hanff takes center-stage in her one-room Manhattan apartment to deliver a mock excoriation of *PW* and her interviewer in particular.

"I am infuriated that *Publishers Weekly* is interviewing me," she begins, and goes on to explain that she had no sooner finished writing an article, fashioned especially for *PW,* about "how one gets to be a walking ad" for one's publishers, when we called to request this interview, thus precluding the purchase of her opus. It is, she says, her tart tongue in cheek, just one more example of how an author's precarious financial state is undermined by even the hands that should feed it.

The zambang opening and antic humor are characteristic of Hanff, who in her latest book again relates the adventures that transformed her life. "At an age when most executives are considering early retirement, I was a failed playwright, a television writer who was unwilling to follow the industry to Hollywood, a writer of children's books no one was publishing any more," she says. Within the next decade, the play adapted from her most popular book was a hit in London and went on to be featured in repertory theaters all over the world, a plaque carrying her name is prominently displayed at the site of the bookstore she made famous in London's Charing Cross Road, she is the recipient of adulatory fan mail, and she has finally achieved an income above the poverty level.

In *Q's Legacy*, Hanff pays tribute to Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, the Cambridge scholar whose books she used to educate herself when she could not afford to go to college during the Depression. Inspired by "Q," who "brought English literature into my life," Hanff embarked on a writing career that, to hear her tell it, has had more downs than ups. As she reveals in *Q's Legacy* with insouciant candor, for every successful book she has written, several others have ended up in the incinerator. "I have not only started bad books, I have *finished* them!" she announces with gusto. "André Deutsch [Hanff's London publisher] once said, 'If you wrote the *phone* book, we'd have to publish it because you have such a big following in London.' I then wrote *three* phone books, and he wouldn't publish any of them because he had the sense to know they were bad books. *I* didn't know, or I never would have finished them."

Hanff ruefully describes some of the books she has thrown away. One was a guidebook resulting from a one-week, government tourist office-sponsored tour of Israel in which she and six other travel writers were "imprisoned in a bus for six days, two-and-one-half of them spent in Tel Aviv. We never got out of the bus except in a group with our tour

guide, whom we nicknamed Brunhilde. Now you *know* that you're never going to get a book out of six days on a bus."

Next was a book on dogs, a subject she was told could not miss. "I happen to be goofy about dogs. So I strung together 150 doggy anecdotes. It was dreadful."

"The third we do not discuss," she announces in a lugubrious voice, and discusses it anyway. "I wrote it for the first time in 1963 at my editor Gene [Genevieve] Young's suggestion. It was terrible, and we dropped it down the incinerator. I wrote it for the second time in 1968. Ditto. I wrote it for the third time in 1975. Ditto. Ask me what I'm going to spend '85 and '86 doing! I think I've finally found the right approach. Of course, it may go down the incinerator like its three predecessors. But I'm hopeful."

The books that have made it to publication and earned Hanff a legion of devoted readers all relate the story of her life. She has learned, she says, that she can only write about things that have happened to her. "You'd be amazed how many ways you can tell the same autobiography. I've never written anything else, though I never told the whole story in any of them. But each time Gene Young read the first draft of my books, she called and said, 'You've left yourself out of it.' It took me just ages to get up the nerve to start with *me.* So this time, when I first had the horrible suspicion I was about to fall down the same rat hole again, I tacked up a sign over my typewriter: 'You've left yourself out of it!' In *Q's Legacy*, line one, page one begins with *me.* Because I finally realized that unless it was a story about my life—in which scads of other people are involved, of course—it would be a bust again."

While Hanff may put herself into her books, her self-deprecatory comments about her appearance should not be taken seriously. At various points in *Q's Legacy* she calls herself "plain and mousy," "small, round-shouldered," "nearsighted, awkward and clumsy," "easy and assured on paper, but awkward and stiff in person." In reality, she is a gamine with a monk's haircut and a friendly, energetic, offhand manner. Shoeless, her trim figure clad in corduroy slacks and a cotton blouse with turned-up sleeves, she could be a peppy teenager. She chops out her conversation in a flagrant Philadelphia accent animated by colloquialisms and delivered in what she calls her "gin baritone," but which is most probably attributable to the cigarettes she smokes.

Her mocking self-put-downs tend to endear Hanff to her readers, many of whom feel that they know her and behave in a proprietary fashion. In *Q's Legacy*, Hanff acknowledges that she is a "cult author" and describes the numerous favors that fans ask of her, from autographing books and mailing them out as gifts, to phoning her in the middle of the night to chat. She answers every fan letter she receives. "I'm a very chummy type," she declares. "I have never written 'Thank you so much for your letter,' because that would take longer than just writing off the top of my head. But when I'm writing 50 thank-you notes, each of the 50 recipients is getting just one and they think I'm their best friend. I, of course, forget what I've said almost immediately."

Sometimes the ramifications of a long-forgotten letter get Hanff in temporary difficulties. Replying to a fan who wrote that he had been tempted to purloin the Marks & Co. sign

that once hung outside the bookstore at 84, Charing Cross Road, she scribbled, "Why didn't you?" and thought no more of the incident. When the fan called some months later and announced triumphantly that he had acquired the sign for her, she was at first nonplussed and then delighted; the handsome silver-and-black name-plate now hangs on the wall in the alcove where shelves hold the treasured volumes she bought from Marks & Co. and the dog-eared texts by Q, the nucleus of her collection and the inspiration for her later purchases.

According to Hanff, every week brings phone calls from people who have just discovered her books, have seen or are acting in the play adapted from *84, Charing Cross Road*. "People phone and they apologize for disturbing me. I say, 'Listen, honey, if I didn't want to talk to you, my number wouldn't be listed.' Then they get loose. Or they begin, 'Miss Hanff, you don't know me.' They're stiff. So I jump in. I say, 'Oh you obviously read books; so I know you.'"

Many callers express appreciation of Hanff's guidebook to New York, titled *The Apple of My Eye*. They would be surprised to know that the book marked a low point in the author's life. According to Hanff, Doubleday commissioned the guide for &dol-lar;7500, a sum so low that her agent Flora Roberts even contributed her fee, adding another $750 to Hanff's meager earnings. Living on the half of the fee advanced to her during the six months it took to research the book, Hanff says she was "flat broke the whole time. A friend and I took 13 day trips touring New York. We did it on the cheap. I could only buy us one decent lunch; the rest of the time we ate in cafeterias. We had ferry fares, museum charges, car fares. But when I turned in an itemized expense account for $138, Doubleday wouldn't pay it! They said it would have to come out of my advance."

This is one of the incidents that have caused Hanff to take a dim view of the author's lot. Another was the fate of her book *Underfoot in Show Business*, which "crept out during the New York newspaper strike in 1962 and promptly died." When Little, Brown reissued the book in 1980, Gene Young sent letters to newspapers and booksellers explaining that it had not been reviewed the first time around and asking them to treat it as a new book. "So what happened? Every reviewer said, 'This is an old book,' and didn't review it. Every bookseller said, 'This is an old book,' and stuck it up in the balcony."

Despite her bad luck in this case, Hanff knows herself incomparably fortunate in her relationship with Young, whom she followed from Harper & Row to Lippincott to Little, Brown. "I hope she stays at Little, Brown," she says somewhat wistfully. "They do the most beautiful job. Their editors care. Their copy editor is wonderful. And their printers are meticulous." Hanff "thanks God" for Young, who is supportive, but not falsely encouraging. "You send your book to Gene, and she calls you the next day and says, 'I read it, I don't like it.' You know where you are instantly. No kid gloves. No smooth, ad agencyese. None of that. But when she does like it, you know it immediately. I depend on that."

Hanff also thanks the deity for James Roose-Evans, who adapted *84, Charing Cross Road* for the stage. She confesses herself "speechless" at the royalties she receives, as

she was when she discovered herself the toast of London at the play's premiere. Equally astonishing to her is that Samuel French purchased the play and made it available to theatre groups around the world, most of whom seem to have contacted her one way or another. She was taken aback however, by a letter from a young Scottish actress who said she had been quite relieved to learn that Hanff was still alive.

Her royalty payments still make Hanff feel somewhat guilty, since she regards these profits as money she did not actually earn. Having fended off the wolf at the door so frequently, she is almost fanatic about managing her finances on the pay-as-you-go plan. "The one drawback about being a writer is that you never know in any month where the rent is coming from six months from then," she says earnestly. "That's why I never buy anything on time." Only the experience of being stranded in the Minneapolis airport sans money or her ticket, which mysteriously disappeared, she says, between the airport door and the check-in counter, convinced her to apply for a credit card, which then lay dormant for a long time before she could convince herself it was not wicked to use it.

She is equally compulsive in her attitude toward her readers, who, she is determined, must get their money's worth from her books. "I worry a helluva lot more about my readers than I do about reviewers," she says. "I have nightmares that they'll run out and get the new book and be disappointed. I'd die rather than let them down."

It is an old-fashioned attitude, but then Hanff is somewhat of an anachronism in the contemporary world. Having taken Sir Arthur Quiller Couch as her personal mentor, and having been introduced in his books to Izaak Walton, Shakespeare and Milton, she is high on the merits of a literary education, particularly as preparation for a writing career. "Of course you must choose your models sensibly," she says. "I love John Henry Newman to death, but he doesn't write American English. Fortunately I had Q's lectures, which kept me from going off the deep end."

Asked whether her method of self-education would seem feasible to young people these days, she answers, "I think the people who still want to are the people who *have* to. There are still kids growing up in slums, with a terrible need to write, who, knowing that college is beyond them, will go to libraries and read anything they can get their hands on. They will be just as dependent on libraries as I was. The ethnics may have changed—these kids are not lower middle class, they are underclass—but the need for knowledge still exists and especially the need for immersion in good writing." Hanff cites James Baldwin, a writer she very much admires, as a master of English prose learned primarily from the Bible.

As for herself, she would do it all over again, Hanff says. "I don't think I had a choice. I wouldn't have half-starved if I could have helped it. But if writing is the only thing you want to do, and the only thing you know how to do, you do it." Sometimes her reliance on her own life experiences for material gives her anxious moments, she confesses. "One thing about the books I write, ideas for them are not going to fly in the window," she observes. "The thing I must do is dig back into my own past, and at my age, I have to go back plenty. I may not have had a busy life, but it's been long, that's a blessing."

Momentarily serious, Hanff then responds in characteristic fashion to our expression of relief that she still has material to draw on. "Relieves *you,* honey," she cackles, "it gives *me* a nervous tic!"

Source: Sybil Steinberg, "*PW* Interviews: Helene Hanff," in *Publishers Weekly,* Vol. 228, No. 5, August 2, 1985, pp. 70-71.

Adaptations

84, Charing Cross Road was adapted as a full-length film, directed by David Hugh Jones and starring Anne Bancroft, Anthony Hopkins, and Judi Dench for Columbia Tri-Star in 1987. It is available from Columbia Tri-Star on DVD and VHS.

Topics for Further Study

The advent of the computer age caused many to question the efficacy of books. Trace the advent of computers in America and their impact on popular opinion regarding the future of books. How does Helene Hanff's correspondence reflect such trends?

In Nora Doel's correspondence (and similar letters from other characters), she shares the impact of rationing on London in the 1950s, thankful for Helene's care parcels. Research and write an essay about the economic climate of London in the 1950s as compared with that of the United States. Considering the quality of life in London during this time, how profound of an impact do you believe Helene's gifts had on Nora and others associated with Marks & Co.?

In one of Helene's letters she includes an excerpt from Edward Arlington Robinson's poem "Miniver Cheevy" to express her feelings about change. Read the entire poem in consideration of Helene's views. Providing specific textual evidence for your assertions, make a case for Helene's choice of poetry she employs to describe herself.

Although Helene does not visit London by the story's end, she does eventually take a trip to Marks & Co. By creating a series of letters, writing them as if they were shared between Maxine (Helene's friend in New York) and Helene, write a fictitious account of the trip. Keep in mind Helene's obsession for the England of English literature. What sorts of places would she visit during her stay? With whom would Helene stay?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Winston Churchill's Conservative Party is re-elected in the general election in England, signaling an end to the Labor government.

Today: In power since 1997, the Labor government of Prime Minister Tony Blair is reelected in June 2001.

1950s: Don Larsen of the New York Yankees pitches a no-hit, no-run game for the first time in World Series history, against the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Today: In 2000 the New York Yankees and the New York Mets play each other in the first World Series between two New York teams since 1956.

1950s: President Eisenhower suffers a heart attack in September 1955, opening up the possibility for Democrats to recapture the presidency.

Today: Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore loses the 2000 presidential election to George

W. Bush in one of the most closely contested elections in the history of the United States.

1950s: The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) is the first company authorized by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to transmit color television programming.

Today: Television consumers are no longer limited to the traditional major network offerings (NBC, CBS, and ABC). People can choose from direct TV, digital cable, and other options providing access to hundreds of channels.

1950s: The Library Services Act extends public library services to several million residents, with forty-eight states awarded services, including librarians and bookmobiles, in new areas.

Today: With the advent of electronic books and hand-held computers capable of downloading and storing printed materials, the future of printed books is debated.

What Do I Read Next?

The Library of Helene Hanff, by Helene Hanff and edited by Stephen Pastore, was published in 1998. The work is a warm and personal biography of the author, further illuminating her correspondence with the bookseller at Charing Cross. It provides the reader with valuable insight into Hanff's collection of books, and by extension, her life.

Bookstore: The Life and Times of Jeannette Watson and Books & Company, by Lynn Tillman, was published in 1999. An account of what has been called one of the most interesting bookstores in New York City, the work covers not only the opening and closing of the shop, but the life of the young woman who founded and ran it. In addition to a forward by Woody Allen, the book also includes shared recollections of Books & Co. by authors and other New York notables.

Bookends: Two Women, One Enduring Friendship, by Madeline B. Stern and Leona G. Rostenberg, was published in 2001. The memoirs of two rare-book dealers and lifelong friends, the work chronicles the lives of two single Jewish-American women, and their struggles and successes against the backdrop of the twentieth century.

Bridget Jones's Diary, by Helen Fielding, was published in 1999. This novel is a warm, humorous look into the private life of a thirty-something publishing professional, as related in a series of diary entries. Bridget Jones is on a quest to quit smoking, lose weight, and find her own sense of inner peace.

Further Study

Basbanes, Nicholas A., *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books,* Henry Holt &Company, 1995.

Bibliomania, or the passion to collect books, is celebrated in this historical account of book collecting which begins 2,200 years ago in Alexandria. The work also includes more contemporary stories of book junkies, some driven to criminal acts to sustain their habit.

———, *Patience and Fortitude: A Roving Chronicle of Book People, Book Places, and Book Culture,* HarperCollins, 2001.

Basbanes focuses on the book culture, talking with obsessed readers about their enduring passion for books. The work is a profile of librarians, writers, readers, booksellers, and the like, all dedicated book enthusiasts.

Hanff, Helene, *Q's Legacy,* Penguin, 1986.

This work offers insight into the creation of *84, Charing Cross Road.* In it, Hanff recalls her discovery of a volume of lectures by a Cambridge don. Under "Q's" guidance (a recommended list of reading), Hanff begins to order books from Marks & Co., the small bookseller at Charing Cross Road, by letter—correspondence that ultimately forms the basis for *84, Charing Cross Road.*

Jenkins, Roy, *Churchill: A Biography,* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001.

Jenkins relays the story of Winston Churchill, one of the greatest figures in English politics, while providing a great historical account of British politics. The author of the work is a former Labor member of the House of Commons.

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Frankel, Haskel, Review of *84, Charing Cross Road,* in *Saturday Review,* November 7, 1970, p. 38.

Kauffman, Stanley, Review of *84, Charing Cross Road,* in *New Republic,* February 23, 1987, p. 24.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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