

The Demon Lover

Short Story by Elizabeth Bowen



READING 5A Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction.

DID YOU KNOW?

Elizabeth Bowen . . .

- served as an air-raid warden in London during World War II.
- counted writers Edith Sitwell, Aldous Huxley, and Virginia Woolf among her friends.

Meet the Author

Elizabeth Bowen 1899–1973

One of the 20th century's most important Anglo-Irish authors, Elizabeth Bowen published 10 novels and more than 70 short stories. Her fiction, which deals primarily with the upper middle class, is beautifully crafted, with finely drawn characters and detailed, evocative descriptions of setting.

Neither English Nor Irish Born in Dublin, Ireland, of Anglo-Irish parents, Bowen spent her early childhood at Bowen's Court, a large stately home that had been in the family since the 18th century. Although her family was well-to-do, her childhood was unsettled. When Bowen was seven, her father suffered a nervous breakdown, and Bowen was sent to England with her mother and a governess. Six years later, her mother died from cancer.

The death of her mother was one of the pivotal events of Bowen's life. The sense of abandonment she felt is evident in much of her fiction, which often explores the themes of grief, displacement, and lost innocence.

The Fulfillment of a Dream In 1923, Bowen married Alan Cameron, an educator. That year, she also published her first collection of stories, *Encounters*; the book was an immediate success, which Bowen found very

encouraging. She had always dreamed of being a writer, once stating, "From the moment that my pen touched paper, I thought of nothing but writing, and since then I have thought of practically nothing else. . . .[W]hen I have nothing to write, I feel only half alive."

Life During Wartime In 1935, Bowen and Cameron moved to London. Many of her best works take place in wartime London, a setting she presents with realism and force. In fact, British novelist and critic Angus Wilson asserted that the short stories Bowen wrote during the war provide some of the best documentation—fact or fiction—of the psychological effects war had on Londoners. Her acclaimed novel *The Heat of the Day* (1949) also takes place in the battered city.

Diverse and Distinguished Bowen's literary career was diverse as well as distinguished. In addition to publishing a new book almost every year, she wrote essays and book reviews for prestigious journals such as the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. She also was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire and was awarded honorary doctorates from Oxford University and Trinity College in Dublin.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-1228



LITERARY ANALYSIS: FORESHADOWING AND FLASHBACK

Authors of dark, spine-tingling tales like “The Demon Lover” often rely on the following narrative techniques to engage readers:

- **Foreshadowing**—a writer’s use of hints and clues to indicate events that will occur later in the story. Writers often generate **suspense**, or excitement, through foreshadowing.
- **Flashback**—an episode that interrupts the action of the story’s plot to show an experience that happened at an earlier time. Writers often provide important background information about characters in flashbacks.

As you read, notice how Bowen uses both foreshadowing and flashback to build your interest in the story.

READING SKILL: ANALYZE AMBIGUITY

In fiction, **ambiguity** refers to the way in which a writer intentionally presents aspects of a story as confusing or open to interpretation. Writers often create ambiguity with words, phrases, and passages that have multiple meanings, as in the following lines from “The Demon Lover”:

A cat wove itself in and out of railings, but no human eye watched Mrs. Drover’s return.

The phrase “no human eye” could mean that nobody watched Mrs. Drover or something far more disturbing—that no *human* watched her. As you read the story, create a chart like the one shown to record and interpret examples of ambiguity.

Examples of Ambiguity	Possible Interpretations
the mysterious letter (lines 32–51)	The caretaker, Mr. Drover, or an unknown character left the letter.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Use context clues to figure out the meanings of the boldfaced words.

1. Clearly he was no visionary, for his speech was **prosaic**.
2. The white moths had a **spectral** appearance in the night sky.
3. Never stingy, she gave without **stint** to many charities.
4. Official duties can **circumscribe** the life of a princess.
5. Brilliant ideas often **emanate** from creative discussions.

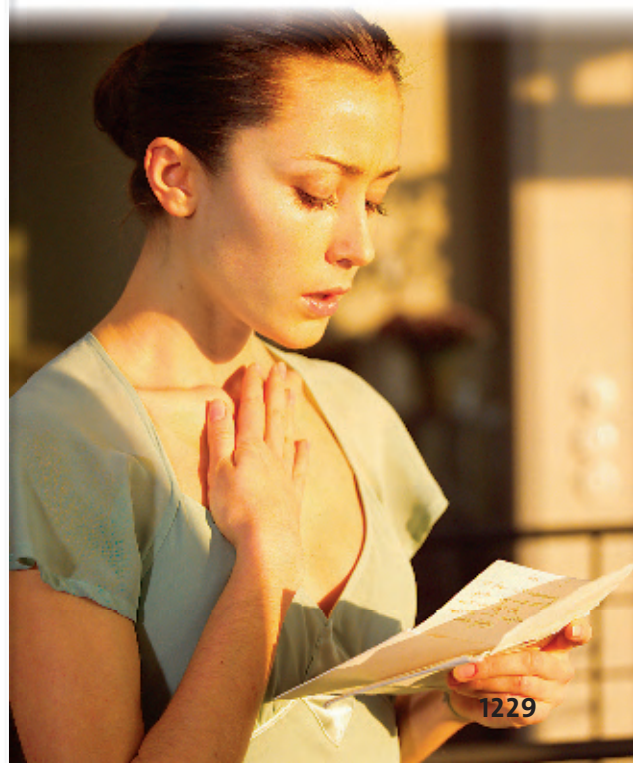


Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

How can a PROMISE haunt you?

“The Demon Lover” is set in 1941 during the Blitz, the bombardment of London by the German air force. Against this dramatic backdrop, the story’s main character, Mrs. Drover, recalls her romantic past, including a dreadful promise made to a soldier going off to battle.

DISCUSS With a partner, make a list of short stories, novels, and movies that feature a character making an important promise. Discuss the promise, the character, and the character’s reasons for offering the promise. Explain whether the character keeps or breaks the promise by the end of the work.



The Demon Lover

Elizabeth Bowen

BACKGROUND The onset of World War II placed a tremendous physical and psychological burden on Londoners. From September 1940 to May 1941, the German air force launched a series of bombing raids designed to obliterate London and force Great Britain to surrender. Many families evacuated the city and moved to country villages and towns. Those who could not leave took refuge in subway tunnels and air-raid shelters during the long nights of horror.

Towards the end of her day in London Mrs. Drover went round to her shut-up house to look for several things she wanted to take away. Some belonged to herself, some to her family, who were by now used to their country life. It was late August; it had been a steamy, showery day: at the moment the trees down the pavement glittered in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun. Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets¹ stood out. In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness had silted up;² a cat wove itself in and out of railings, but no human eye watched Mrs. Drover's return. Shifting some parcels under her arm, she slowly forced
10 round her latchkey in an unwilling lock, then gave the door, which had warped, a push with her knee. Dead air came out to meet her as she went in. **A**

The staircase window having been boarded up, no light came down into the hall. But one door, she could just see, stood ajar, so she went quickly through into the room and unshuttered the big window in there. Now the **prosaic** woman, looking about her, was more perplexed than she knew by everything that she saw, by traces of her long former habit of life—the yellow smoke stain up the white

Analyze Visuals ►

Why do you think the photographer chose to tint and blur this image?

A FORESHADOWING

In lines 1–11, what details suggest that Mrs. Drover may be unsafe in her London home?

prosaic (prō-zā'ĭk) *adj.*
not given to poetic flights of fancy; lacking imagination; dull

1. **parapets** (pă'rə-pĭts): low walls or railings, such as those on balconies.

2. **silted up**: piled up, like sediment deposited in a river.



marble mantelpiece, the ring left by a vase on the top of the *escritoire*;³ the bruise in the wallpaper where, on the door being thrown open widely, the china handle had always hit the wall. The piano, having gone away to be stored, had left what
20 looked like claw marks on its part of the *parquet*.⁴ Though not much dust had seeped in, each object wore a film of another kind; and, the only ventilation being the chimney, the whole drawing room smelled of the cold hearth. Mrs. Drover put down her parcels on the *escritoire* and left the room to proceed upstairs; the things she wanted were in a bedroom chest.

She had been anxious to see how the house was—the part-time caretaker she shared with some neighbors was away this week on his holiday, known to be not yet back. At the best of times he did not look in often, and she was never sure that she trusted him. There were some cracks in the structure, left by the last bombing, on which she was anxious to keep an eye. Not that one could do anything—
30 A shaft of refracted daylight now lay across the hall. She stopped dead and stared at the hall table—on this lay a letter addressed to her.

She thought first—then the caretaker *must* be back. All the same, who, seeing the house shuttered, would have dropped a letter in at the box? It was not a circular, it was not a bill. And the post office redirected, to the address in the country, everything for her that came through the post. The caretaker (even if he *were* back) did not know she was due in London today—her call here had been planned to be a surprise—so his negligence in the manner of this letter, leaving it to wait in the dusk and the dust, annoyed her. Annoyed, she picked up the letter, which bore no stamp. But it cannot be important, or they would know . . . She
40 took the letter rapidly upstairs with her, without a stop to look at the writing till she reached what had been her bedroom, where she let in light. The room looked over the garden and other gardens: the sun had gone in; as the clouds sharpened and lowered, the trees and rank⁵ lawns seemed already to smoke with dark. Her reluctance to look again at the letter came from the fact that she felt intruded upon—and by someone contemptuous of her ways. However, in the tenseness preceding the fall of rain she read it: it was a few lines.

*Dear Kathleen: You will not have forgotten that today is our anniversary, and the day we said. The years have gone by at once slowly and fast. In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. I was sorry to
50 see you leave London, but was satisfied that you would be back in time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged. Until then . . .* K. **B**

B AMBIGUITY

Reread lines 47–51. Who is “K,” the author of the mysterious letter? Offer two possible identifications for this ambiguous character.

Mrs. Drover looked for the date: it was today’s. She dropped the letter onto the bedsprings, then picked it up to see the writing again—her lips, beneath the remains of lipstick, beginning to go white. She felt so much the change in her own face that she went to the mirror, polished a clear patch in it and looked at once urgently and stealthily in. She was confronted by a woman of forty-four,

3. **escritoire** (ěs’krĭ-twār’): a writing desk or table.

4. **parquet** (pär-kā’): a wood floor made of small blocks laid in geometric patterns.

5. **rank**: growing vigorously and coarsely.

with eyes starting out under a hat brim that had been rather carelessly pulled down. She had not put on any more powder since she left the shop where she ate her solitary tea. The pearls her husband had given her on their marriage hung loose round her now rather thinner throat, slipping in the V of the pink wool jumper⁶ her sister knitted last autumn as they sat round the fire. Mrs. Drover's most normal expression was one of controlled worry, but of assent. Since the birth of the third of her little boys, attended by a quite serious illness, she had had an intermittent muscular flicker to the left of her mouth, but in spite of this she could always sustain a manner that was at once energetic and calm.

Turning from her own face as precipitately as she had gone to meet it, she went to the chest where the things were, unlocked it, threw up the lid and knelt to search. But as rain began to come crashing down she could not keep from looking over her shoulder at the stripped bed on which the letter lay. Behind the blanket of rain the clock of the church that still stood struck six—with rapidly heightening apprehension she counted each of the slow strokes. “The hour arranged . . . My God,” she said, “*what* hour? How should I . . . ? After twenty-five years . . .”

The young girl talking to the soldier in the garden had not ever completely seen his face. It was dark; they were saying goodbye under a tree. Now and then—for it felt, from not seeing him at this intense moment, as though she had never seen him at all—she verified his presence for these few moments longer by putting out a hand, which he each time pressed, without very much kindness, and painfully, onto one of the breast buttons of his uniform. That cut of the button on the palm of her hand was, principally, what she was to carry away. This was so near the end of a leave from France that she could only wish him already gone. It was August 1916.⁷ Being not kissed, being drawn away from and looked at, intimidated Kathleen till she imagined **spectral** glitters in the place of his eyes. Turning away and looking back up the lawn she saw, through branches of trees, the drawing-room window alight: she caught a breath for the moment when she could go running back there into the safe arms of her mother and sister, and cry: “What shall I do, what shall I do? He has gone.”

Hearing her catch her breath, her fiancé said, without feeling: “Cold?”

“You’re going away such a long way.”

“Not so far as you think.”

90 “I don’t understand?”

“You don’t have to,” he said. “You will. You know what we said.”

“But that was—suppose you—I mean, suppose.”

“I shall be with you,” he said, “sooner or later. You won’t forget that. You need do nothing but wait.”

Only a little more than a minute later she was free to run up the silent lawn. Looking in through the window at her mother and sister, who did not for the moment perceive her, she already felt that unnatural promise drive down between her and the rest of all humankind. No other way of having given herself could

Language Coach

Derivations Many different words are **derived**, or generated, from the same base word. A precipice, which comes from a Latin word meaning “headlong fall,” is a steep cliff. How is *precipitately* (line 66), meaning “suddenly,” related to *precipice*? What other word derivations are related to *precipice*?

spectral (spĕk'trəl) *adj.*
ghostly

6. **jumper**: pullover sweater.

7. **leave . . . 1916**: The young man was on leave from the fighting in France during World War I.

have made her feel so apart, lost and foresworn.⁸ She could not have plighted a
100 more sinister troth.⁹ **C**

Kathleen behaved well when, some months later, her fiancé was reported missing, presumed killed. Her family not only supported her but were able to praise her courage without **stint** because they could not regret, as a husband for her, the man they knew almost nothing about. They hoped she would, in a year or two, console herself—and had it been only a question of consolation things might have gone much straighter ahead. But her trouble, behind just a little grief, was a complete dislocation from everything. She did not reject other lovers, for these failed to appear: for years she failed to attract men—and with the approach of her thirties she became natural enough to share her family’s anxiousness on
110 this score. She began to put herself out, to wonder; and at thirty-two she was very greatly relieved to find herself being courted by William Drover. She married him, and the two of them settled down in this quiet, arboreal part of Kensington:¹⁰ in this house the years piled up, her children were born and they all lived till they were driven out by the bombs of the next war. Her movements as Mrs. Drover were **circumscribed**, and she dismissed any idea that they were still watched.

As things were—dead or living the letter-writer sent her only a threat. Unable, for some minutes, to go on kneeling with her back exposed to the empty room, Mrs. Drover rose from the chest to sit on an upright chair whose back was firmly against the wall. The desuetude¹¹ of her former bedroom, her married London
120 home’s whole air of being a cracked cup from which memory, with its reassuring power, had either evaporated or leaked away, made a crisis—and at just this crisis the letter-writer had, knowledgeably, struck. The hollowness of the house this evening canceled years on years of voices, habits and steps. Through the shut windows she only heard rain fall on the roofs around. To rally herself, she said she was in a mood—and for two or three seconds shutting her eyes, told herself that she had imagined the letter. But she opened them—there it lay on the bed.

On the supernatural side of the letter’s entrance she was not permitting her mind to dwell. Who, in London, knew she meant to call at the house today? Evidently, however, this had been known. The caretaker, *had* he come back,
130 had had no cause to expect her: he would have taken the letter in his pocket, to forward it, at his own time, through the post. There was no other sign that the caretaker had been in—but, if not? Letters dropped in at doors of deserted houses do not fly or walk to tables in halls. They do not sit on the dust of empty tables with the air of certainty that they will be found. There is needed some human hand—but nobody but the caretaker had a key. Under circumstances she did not care to consider, a house can be entered without a key. It was possible that she was not alone now. She might be being waited for, downstairs. Waited for—until when? Until “the hour arranged.” At least that was not six o’clock: six has struck.

She rose from the chair and went over and locked the door.

C FLASHBACK

Reread the flashback in lines 73–100. What important information do you learn about Mrs. Drover and the writer of the letter in this episode?

stint (stĭnt) *n.* limitation; restriction

circumscribe
(sŭr’kəm-skrĭb’) *v.* to restrict; to limit

8. **foresworn**: guilty of perjury.

9. **plighted . . . troth**: made a more ominous promise of marriage.

10. **arboreal** (ār-bŏr’ē-əl) . . . **Kensington**: woodsy part of Kensington, a residential London neighborhood.

11. **desuetude** (dĕs’wĭ-tōōd’): disuse.

140 The thing was, to get out. To fly? No, not that: she had to catch her train. As a woman whose utter dependability was the keystone of her family life she was not willing to return to the country, to her husband, her little boys and her sister, without the objects she had come up to fetch. Resuming work at the chest she set about making up a number of parcels in a rapid, fumbling-decisive way. These, with her shopping parcels, would be too much to carry; these meant a taxi—at the thought of the taxi her heart went up and her normal breathing resumed. I will ring up the taxi now; the taxi cannot come too soon: I shall hear the taxi out there running its engine, till I walk calmly down to it through the hall. I'll ring up—But no: the telephone is cut off . . . She tugged at a knot she had tied wrong.

150 The idea of flight . . . He was never kind to me, not really. I don't remember him kind at all. Mother said he never considered me. He was set on me, that was what it was—not love. Not love, not meaning a person well. What did he do, to make me promise like that? I can't remember—But she found that she could.

She remembered with such dreadful acuteness that the twenty-five years since then dissolved like smoke and she instinctively looked for the weal¹² left by the button on the palm of her hand. She remembered not only all that he said and did but the complete suspension of *her* existence during that August week. I was not myself—they all told me so at the time. She remembered—but with one white burning blank as where acid has dropped on a photograph: *under no conditions*
160 could she remember his face.

So, wherever he may be waiting, I shall not know him. You have no time to run from a face you do not expect.

The thing was to get to the taxi before any clock struck what could be the hour. She would slip down the street and round the side of the square to where the square gave on the main road. She would return in the taxi, safe, to her own door, and bring the solid driver into the house with her to pick up the parcels from room to room. The idea of the taxi driver made her decisive, bold: she unlocked her door, went to the top of the staircase and listened down.

She heard nothing—but while she was hearing nothing the *passé*¹³ air of the
170 staircase was disturbed by a draft that traveled up to her face. It **emanated** from the basement: down there a door or window was being opened by someone who chose this moment to leave the house.

The rain had stopped; the pavements steamily shone as Mrs. Drover let herself out by inches from her own front door into the empty street. The unoccupied houses opposite continued to meet her look with their damaged stare. Making towards the thoroughfare and the taxi, she tried not to keep looking behind. Indeed, the silence was so intense—one of those creeks of London silence exaggerated this summer by the damage of war—that no tread could have gained on hers unheard. Where her street debouched¹⁴ on the square where people
180 went on living, she grew conscious of, and checked, her unnatural pace. Across

Language Coach

Meanings of Idioms

Idioms are expressions that have a special meaning different from the dictionary meaning of the words. In some contexts, the expression *the thing* can mean “that which is important or essential.” Paraphrase “The thing was, to get out” (line 140).

emanate (ēm'ə-nāt') v.
to issue forth



12. **weal**: a mark or ridge raised on the skin; a welt.

13. **passé** (pă-sā') *French*: old; stale.

14. **debouched** (dī-bôcht'): emerged.



the open end of the square two buses impassively passed each other: women, a perambulator,¹⁵ cyclists, a man wheeling a barrow signaled, once again, the ordinary flow of life. At the square's most populous corner should be—and was—the short taxi rank. This evening, only one taxi—but this, although it presented its blank rump, appeared already to be alertly waiting for her. Indeed, without looking round the driver started his engine as she panted up from behind and put her hand on the door. As she did so, the clock struck seven. The taxi faced the main road: to make the trip back to her house it would have to turn—she had settled back on the seat and the taxi *had* turned before she, surprised by its
190 knowing movement, recollected that she had not “said where.” She leaned forward to scratch at the glass panel that divided the driver’s head from her own.

The driver braked to what was almost a stop, turned round and slid the glass panel back: the jolt of this flung Mrs. Drover forward till her face was almost into the glass. Through the aperture¹⁶ driver and passenger, not six inches between them, remained for an eternity eye to eye. Mrs. Drover’s mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream. After that she continued to scream freely and to beat with her gloved hands on the glass all round as the taxi, accelerating without mercy, made off with her into the hinterland¹⁷ of deserted streets.  

D AMBIGUITY
Identify two possible interpretations of the story’s conclusion. What effect does this ambiguous ending have on you as a reader?

15. **perambulator**: baby carriage.

16. **aperture** (ăp’ər-chər): opening.

17. **hinterland**: backcountry; wilderness.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why has the Drover family left their home in London?
2. **Recall** Why does Mrs. Drover return to the house?
3. **Summarize** Describe what happens after Mrs. Drover leaves the house.



READING 5A Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction.

Literary Analysis

4. **Understand Setting and Mood** Review the description of the story's setting in lines 1–24. What mood, or atmosphere, does this passage establish? Cite specific words and phrases to support your answer.
- 5. **Examine Foreshadowing** Reread the following passages from “The Demon Lover.” In what specific ways do they hint at important events presented later in the story?
 - “Her reluctance . . . of her ways.” (lines 43–45)
 - “Only a little more . . . a more sinister troth.” (lines 95–100)
 - “She heard nothing . . . leave the house.” (lines 169–172)
6. **Draw Conclusions About Character** Describe the thoughts and behavior of Mrs. Drover in each of the following scenes. Do you think that she is a victim of her own troubled mind, some supernatural force, or a combination of these?
 - her reaction to the mysterious letter (lines 52–65)
 - her farewell meeting with her former fiancé (lines 73–100)
 - her memories as she packs (lines 150–160)
- 7. **Analyze Ambiguity** Review the chart in which you recorded different examples of ambiguity. Identify the ambiguous word, phrase, or passage that you found most intriguing or effective. In your opinion, what does this example contribute to the story?
- 8. **Evaluate Flashback** Reread the flashback in lines 73–100. Would the story be as powerful if the events had been told in chronological order without the use of flashback? Explain your thoughts.

Literary Criticism

9. **Cultural Context** The title of Bowen's story derives from a figure in gothic literature, the demon lover—a man who abducts his sweetheart because she has broken her promise of faithfulness. The sweetheart happily follows her lover, only to discover too late that he is leading her toward death. In what ways does this information enhance your understanding of the story?

*How can a **PROMISE** haunt you?*

Do you think the protagonist of Bowen's story got what she deserved for breaking her promise? Why or why not?

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Identify the antonym of each boldfaced vocabulary word.

1. **prosaic**: (a) prosperous, (b) everyday, (c) imaginative
2. **spectral**: (a) gloomy, (b) whimsical, (c) substantial
3. **stint**: (a) weakness, (b) generosity, (c) beginning
4. **circumscribe**: (a) control, (b) decide, (c) release
5. **emanate**: (a) influence, (b) absorb, (c) exude

WORD LIST

circumscribe
emanate
prosaic
spectral
stint

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• approach • assume • environment • method • strategy

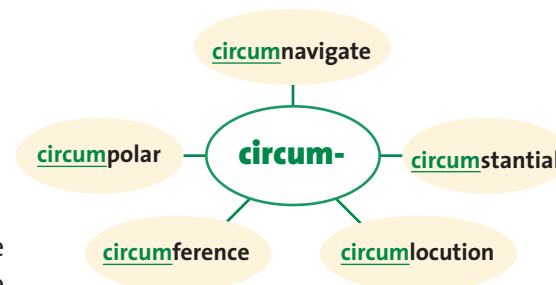
How do you **approach** the existence of the supernatural? Do you **assume** that ghosts and other supernatural figures may be real or do you think they are merely projections of the human mind? Discuss this question in a small group. Use at least two of the Academic Vocabulary words in your discussion.



READING 1A Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas derived from Latin affixes.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN PREFIX *circum-*

The word *circumscribe* joins the prefix *circum-*, which means “around,” to the root *scribe*, which comes from the Latin word for “to write.” *Circumscribe* means “to write marks or a circle around someone or something,” setting limits within which that person or thing can operate. *Circumscribe* also has a technical academic meaning: in geometry, it describes, for example, a circle surrounding and intersecting the corners of a square. Each word in the web diagram at right has a technical, academic usage. Some are also used in everyday speech.



PRACTICE Use context clues and your knowledge of word parts to explain the meaning of each boldfaced word. Then, where possible, use the boldfaced word in an everyday sense. Note whether the common, everyday sense of the word is different from its technical meaning.

1. **Circumstantial** evidence—namely, motive and opportunity—pointed to the defendant’s guilt; but no physical evidence linked her to the crime.
2. One form of euphemism, the substitution of mild or vague language for harsh, realistic terminology, is **circumlocution**.
3. The formula for the **circumference** of a circle is $2\pi r$.
4. Was Magellan the first explorer to **circumnavigate** the globe?
5. **Circumpolar** objects, such as stars, never sink below the horizon.

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The Flowering of Irish Letters

For hundreds of years, Irish literature written in English was almost entirely a part of the English literary tradition; it did not have its own identity. However, in the 20th century, as Ireland undertook its quest for national independence and rebounded from the devastation of the potato famine, the Irish began to take stock of their own cultural heritage.

Led by William Butler Yeats, writers of the Irish literary revival vigorously explored the question of Irish identity. Some wrote explicitly about such topics as Irish rural life, the effects of colonialism, and Irish folklore. Others wrote about classical topics or accounts of modern life, but always with an ear for the lyricism of Irish speech and a sensitivity toward common themes such as spirituality and repression, often tinged with fatalism. Also, modern Irish writers shared the clever and sometimes dark wit typical of their countrymen.

Writing to Compare

The Irish writers in this section cover different subject matter, but they share similarities in theme and tone. Choose two selections and write an essay comparing them.

Consider

- each author's use of imagery and figurative language
- each author's tone, or attitude toward the subject
- the themes represented

Extension Online

INQUIRY & RESEARCH Use the Internet to research the political and cultural conditions surrounding the Irish Literary Renaissance (sometimes called the Irish Revival). What values were being expressed? How did the movement spread? How was the literature of this revival received by the public? Write a brief report to explain your findings.



READING 15A Write an analytical essay.

Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen at Bowen's Court, her ancestral home in County Cork, Ireland

