General Approaches to Dealing with the Texts in this Collection

Here are some activities that you could do on *any* of the texts in the collection. It would be worth doing a range of them, to vary your approach, doing some that are more structured and involve discussion and reflection, and others that help you to build up confidence in tackling texts independently or in the context of exams.

Timed readings

- Do a timed essay of one of the texts.

Sharing readings

- Do a timed essay of one of the texts. Share your reading with one or two other people and comment on differences both in what was said and how it was said. Focus particularly on what seemed most successful. Share particularly good bits with the rest of the class.

Stepping back

- Do a close reading of a text and then step back to reflect on the approach you took. Write a short paragraph explaining your focus and your approach, how it worked and whether you might tackle the piece differently another time.

Annotate and talk – don't write

- Work on one of the texts, annotating it and then talking about your observations and the ideas that spring from these. Start by working individually, then share ideas in discussion, to build up your confidence in approaching unseen texts on your own.

Write a first paragraph

- Just write a first paragraph, so that you can share different ways of making the leap between reading and thinking and putting your ideas down on paper.

Learn from the published readings

- Do your own close reading of one of the texts which has an accompanying reading by an academic, teacher, writer or student. Do your close reading either in discussion or as a piece of writing, then read the accompanying readings. Reflect on the approach taken by the other writer, the ideas he or she raises and what each of your readings has revealed about the text. Think also about what the writer's approach has taught you, that you'll take with you into your future work on close reading.

Comparative close reading

- Take two texts from the collection that have some things in common, such as a common theme, or an aspect of genre, or something similar about their tone (humour or irony, for instance). Write a comparative close reading which draws out the key points of similarity and difference in these two texts.

Activities in the publication

- Do some of the other activities in this publication, that are designed to develop particular skills in close reading. (See pages 27-53.)

What is Close Reading?

Close reading is at the heart of literary studies at both advanced level and at university. But what exactly is it?

- As a class, share your ideas about what close reading might involve.

The critics, academics and writers who contributed a close reading to this anthology also answered this question. Their responses are included below.

- Read their thoughts. Do any of their ideas chime with yours? Do they offer you any new views of what close reading might be? Together, talk about the range of ideas represented.
- After you have done some close readings of your own, look back at these descriptions of close reading and either choose the one that best captures your views or write one of your own.

Professor Peter Barry

Good close reading should be like looking at a large picture in an art gallery. We don't begin by marching right up to a big canvas to scrutinise a detail – that is not looking at the picture at all. Rather, we stand at a distance first and take in the whole, then move in on something, then stand back again and take in how that and other details relate to each other, and to the whole. My mental catchphrase is 'Talk about the meanings as well as the words.'

Professor Robert Eaglestone

Close reading is the heart of English. You can never read too closely and very often texts read closely say very different things from what you thought at first. One of the joys of doing English is watching a text grow and change under your very eyes.

Juliet Harrison

Good close reading involves the three-step process of understanding, analysing and interpreting. This, combined with the requisite terminology, forms a sound basis for a piece of close reading.

Michael Hebron

Good close reading is slow reading. You don't hurry over a fine meal, and an equally rich text means we should be ready to pause and savour its details and nuances. And close reading is a creative act: the author makes a text in response to something, and we make something in response to that text. It is a secondary activity, perhaps, but without secondary reactions explosions soon fizzle out.

Professor Ben Knights

Humans do a lot of close reading ('What was she getting at when she said ...'). But they often also slip into sloppy and inattentive reading. 'Close reading' in the sense used here is a method of focusing attention on the precise nuances of words and the situations in which words are exchanged. As we read closely, we need to be able to move freely between the 'micro' and the 'macro', the detail and the larger pattern.

Andrew McCallum

Close reading focuses on the small things in a text as a way of reflecting on the whole. Only in a close reading can we begin to see the staggering range of possibilities opened up by the language of a text, to see how small things, intentionally or otherwise, wondrously, magically, become large.

Sean McEvoy

Close reading is paying the text the respect its complexity as a work of art deserves.

Professor John Mullan

Close reading means discovering not your own ingenuity, but the ingenuity of the writer.

Professor David Punter

Good close reading begins from remembering that words are never simple, that they have a life of their own. They constantly elude us, yet in order to make sense of any text we have to keep trying to track them down!

Professor Nicolas Tredell

Close reading demands careful, responsive attention to verbal detail and its nuances of meaning and implication, and to the ways in which such detail contributes to, and sometimes contradicts, the overall significance of a specific passage.

Nigel Wheale

Successful close reading is when the text seems to take you beyond yourself, to ideas and perceptions that are new, when you surprise yourself with how much you have discovered and have understood. These meanings are not magically 'within the text' itself; you have constructed them from your active reading and research made in response to the passage.

The best close reading knows what words have meant across time. It is a way of understanding even quite distant contexts through their own language, yet respecting the difference between our present and their past.

Reading Like a Writer

In her book *Reading Like a Writer*, Francine Prose explores the process of close reading, demonstrating the discoveries a reader makes once he or she pays really close attention to the words a writer uses. Francine Prose, who is addressing creative writing students, suggests that the best way to develop your ability to write is to read closely, carefully, with a writer's eyes. As you develop your own skills of close reading and your ability to write effectively about a text, you might consider how useful an idea 'reading like a writer' is for literature students.

In the extract on pages 19-20, Francine Prose reads closely the first paragraph of Flannery O'Connor's short story 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'.

- Read the opening paragraph from the story and briefly talk about it in pairs or as a class.

> The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind. Bailey was the son she lived with, her only boy. He was sitting on the edge of his chair at the table, bent over the orange sports section of the *Journal*. 'Now look here, Bailey,' she said, 'see here, read this,' and she stood with one hand on her thin hip and the other rattling the newspaper at his bald head. 'Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed towards Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did.'

- Now read Prose's analysis. Share your first response to it. Did the close analysis reveal anything you had not noticed? Or did it give you a completely different view of the opening paragraph?
- Read the analysis again, this time focusing on what it is that Prose is doing. Highlight two or three examples which strike you as particularly illuminating about the opening paragraph or the process of close reading.
- If Francine Prose were asked to write a short definition of the process of close reading, what do you think she would say? Draft a definition, along the lines of those offered by the contributors to this resource on pages 16 and 17.

Francine Prose: Reading Like a Writer

With so much reading ahead of you, the temptation might be to speed up. But in fact it's essential to slow down and read every word. Because one important thing that can be learned by reading slowly is the seemingly obvious but oddly underappreciated fact that language is the medium we use in much the same way a composer uses notes, the way a painter uses paint. I realise it may seem obvious, but it's surprising how easily we lose sight of the fact that words are the raw materials out of which literature is crafted.

Every page was once a blank page, just as every word that appears on it now was not always there, but instead reflects the final result of countless large and small deliberations. All the elements of good writing depend on the writer's skill in choosing one word instead of another. And what grabs and keeps our interest has everything to do with those choices.

One way to compel yourself to slow down and stop at every word is to ask yourself what sort of information each word – each word choice – is conveying. Reading with that question in mind, let's consider the wealth of information provided by the first paragraph of Flannery O'Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'.

> 'The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind. Bailey was the son she lived with, her only boy. He was sitting on the edge of his chair at the table, bent over the orange sports section of the Journal. 'Now look here, Bailey,' she said, 'see here, read this,' and she stood with one hand on her thin hip and the other rattling the newspaper at his bald head. 'Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed towards Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did.'

The first simple declarative sentence could hardly be more plain: subject, verb, infinitive, preposition. There is not one adjective or adverb to distract us from the central fact. But how much is contained in these eight little words!

Here, as in the openings of many stories and novels, we are confronted by one important choice that a writer of fiction needs to make: the question of what to call her characters. Joe, Joe Smith, Mr Smith? Not, in this case, Grandma or Grandma Smith (no one in this story has a last name) or, let's say, Ethel or Ethel Smith, or Mrs Smith, or any of the myriad terms of address that might have established different degrees of psychic distance and sympathy between the reader and the old woman.

Calling her 'the grandmother' at once reduces her to her role in the family, as does the fact that her daughter-in-law is never called anything but 'the children's mother.' At the same time, the title gives her (like The Misfit) an archetypal, mythic role that elevates her and keeps us from getting too chummy with this woman whose name we never learn, even as the writer is preparing our hearts to break at the critical moment to which the grandmother's whole life and the events of the story have led her.

'The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida.' The first sentence is a refusal, which, in its very simplicity, emphasises the force with which the old woman is digging in her heels. It's a concentrated act of negative will, which we will come to understand in all its tragic folly – that is, the foolishness of attempting to exert one's will when fate or destiny

(or as O'Connor would argue, God) has other plans for us. And finally, the no-nonsense austerity of the sentence's construction gives it a kind of authority that – like *Moby Dick's* first sentence 'Call me Ishmael' – makes us feel that the author is in control, an authority that draws us farther into the story.

The first part of the second sentence – 'She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee' – locates us in geography, that is, in the South. And that one word, 'connections' (as opposed to relatives or family or people), reveals the grandmother's sense of her own faded gentility, of having come down in the world, a semi-deluded self-image that, like the illusions of many other O'Connor characters, will contribute to the character's downfall.

The sentence's second half – 'she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind' – seizes our own attention more strongly than it would have had O'Connor written, say, 'taking every chance'. The verb quietly but succinctly telegraphs both the grandmother's fierceness and the passivity of Bailey, 'the son she lived with, her only boy,' two phrases that convey their domestic situation as well as the infantilising dominance and the simultaneous tenderness that the grandmother feels toward her son. That word boy will take on tragic resonance later. 'Bailey Boy!' the old woman will cry after her son is killed by The Misfit, who is already about to make his appearance in the newspaper that the grandmother is 'rattling' at her boy's bald head. Meanwhile, the paradox of a bald, presumably middle-aged boy leads us to make certain accurate conclusions about the family constellation.

The Misfit is 'aloose' – here we find one of those words by which O'Connor conveys the rhythm and flavour of a local dialect without subjecting us to the annoying apostrophes, dropped g's, the shootin' and talkin' and cussin' and the bad grammar with which other authors attempt to transcribe regional speech. The final sentences of the paragraph – 'I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did' – encapsulate the hilarious and maddening quality of the grandmother's manipulativeness. She'll use anything, even an imagined encounter with an escaped criminal, to divert the family vacation from Florida to east Tennessee. And her apparently unlikely fantasy of encountering The Misfit may cause us to reflect on the peculiar egocentrism and narcissism of those people who are constantly convinced that, however minuscule the odds, the stray bullet will somehow find them. Meanwhile, again because of word choice, the final sentence is already alluding to those questions of conscience, morality, the spirit and soul that will reveal themselves as being at the heart of O'Connor's story.

Give the size of the country, we think, they can't possibly run into the criminal about whom the grandmother has warned them. And yet we may recall Chekhov's remark that the gun we see onstage in an early scene should probably go off by the play's end. So what is going to happen? This short passage has already ushered us into a world that is realistic but at the same time beyond the reach of ordinary logic, and into a narrative that we will follow from this introduction as inexorably as the grandmother is destined to meet a fate that (we do suspect) will involve The Misfit. Pared and edited down, highly concentrated, a model of compression from which it would be hard to excise one word, this single passage achieves all this, or more, since there will be additional subtleties and complexities obvious only to each individual reader.

1 Minute, 5 Minutes, 15 Minutes – Write!

This strategy for developing the skills of close reading borrows from art where students are frequently asked to do a series of timed sketches of a still life or life model, before being given the time and freedom to do a fuller drawing or painting.

For this activity you need a text short enough for you to respond to it in a very limited amount of time – poems work particularly well.

- Before you begin, you might like to read the example on page 39 which shows one reader's developing response to Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem Pied Beauty.

- Now work through the sequence outlined in the table, below.

Response time	Form of response
1 minute	• Skim-read the text. After a minute, turn the text over and write for one minute.
5 minutes	• Read, annotate and reflect on the text for five minutes, without writing. • Without looking back at your one-minute response, write for five minutes in any way you choose. If you are puzzled, write about what is puzzling you – you could even frame these puzzles as questions.
15 minutes	• Read and think about the text again for 15 minutes, without writing. • Write about the text for 15 minutes. • Read over everything you have written about the text. As you read your work, try to take a step back and notice the way in which you have responded each time, and whether there is any change or development.
45 minutes	• As soon as possible after completing your 15-minute response, write a timed essay on your close reading of the text. (You could do this for homework if you have run out of lesson time.)

Reflecting on the process

- Look over the sequence of responses, including your timed essay. Then, as a class, share what you have discovered about the way in which your interpretation of the text developed.

An example, showing one reader's timed responses

Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

1-minute response

Something about this poem really appeals. Like its sound – the alliteration, the bounciness of the rhythm. About nature? Think religious too. Bit tripped up by some of the words though – 'rose-moles'? 'brinded'? Why does it work well? In some ways just like a list.

5-minute response

This time I read the poem aloud, to hear it. It really is a lovely poem to hear. It's also helped me get to grips a bit with the structure of the poem – I think maybe all of the things in nature it lists are 'dappled' – the things God is being praised or thanked for. I've been mulling over why he chose 'dappled' things. I can see it gives the poet some beautiful visual images to use – the picture of the fields especially. Autumn or spring though? Plough makes me think autumn. Interesting that so many descriptions come *after* the noun. For rhythm maybe? Building up the description too – not really many things listed, but a real weight of description to paint the picture. Tried to reverse the order. Doesn't work AT ALL. So stupid of me – hadn't noticed the rhyme before I tried that swap. I want to think more about the break between stanzas.

15-minute response

It's amazing how this poem has burrowed its way into my head – two lines in particular 'Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow and plough' and 'all trades, their gear and tackle and trim'.

I need to move on to think about the second stanza but just want to think a bit more about these two lines. Most of the first stanza seems to be about natural things – I thought 'pied', 'dappled', 'stippled', all of which have a sense of contrast about them, might be to show the variety of the natural world.

Then in the last line there's a real shift, a move away from nature to 'trades', the jobs people do – and even more specifically the tools of the job and everything associated with it. Is God being praised for creating that variety too? It's not a very 'poetic' subject but the use of alliteration, the syntax and the rhythm seem to elevate the 'trades' into something really worthy of recognition (maybe even part of nature?). I suppose in a sense this move towards 'trades' was anticipated in 'Landscape plotted and pieced' – this is the way the land looks when it is farmed, not how it looks naturally.

The middle line of this second stanza fits with my idea that this is a poem praising God for variety – even drawing attention to the contrasts, as though both are needed, one only existing because of the other.

What intrigues me most though is the beginning of the stanza: 'All things counter, original, spare, strange' – this very much draws attention to the odd, the marginal, things outside of the mainstream perhaps, or against tradition. I wonder why?

The final two lines have a real sense of conclusion – partly, I think, created by the rhyme which draws the poem together.

Raymond Carver: Popular Mechanics (1981)

Early that day the weather turned and the snow was melting into dirty water. Streaks of it ran down from the little shoulder-high window that faced the backyard. Cars slushed by on the street outside, where it was getting dark. But it was getting dark on the inside too.

He was in the bedroom pushing clothes into a suitcase when she came to the door.

I'm glad you're leaving! I'm glad you're leaving! she said. Do you hear?

He kept on putting his things into the suitcase.

Son of a bitch! I'm so glad you're leaving! She began to cry. You can't even look me in the face, can you?

Then she noticed the baby's picture on the bed and picked it up.

He looked at her and she wiped her eyes and stared at him before turning and going back to the living room.

Bring that back, he said.

Just get your things and get out, she said.

He did not answer. He fastened the suitcase, put on his coat, looked around the bedroom before turning off the light. Then he went out to the living room.

She stood in the doorway of the little kitchen, holding the baby.

I want the baby, he said.

Are you crazy?

No, but I want the baby. I'll get someone to come by for his things.

You're not touching this baby, she said.

The baby had begun to cry and she uncovered the blanket from around his head.

Oh, oh, she said, looking at the baby.

He moved toward her.

For God's sake! she said. She took a step back into the kitchen.

I want the baby.

Get out of here!

She turned and tried to hold the baby over in a corner behind the stove.

But he came up. He reached across the stove and tightened his hands on the baby.

Let go of him, he said.

Get away, get away! she cried.

The baby was red-faced and screaming. In the scuffle they knocked down a flowerpot that hung behind the stove.

He crowded her into the wall then, trying to break her grip. He held on to the baby and pushed with all his weight.

Let go of him, he said.

Don't, she said. You're hurting the baby, she said.

I'm not hurting the baby, he said.

The kitchen window gave no light. In the near-dark he worked on her fisted fingers with one hand and with the other hand he gripped the screaming baby up under an arm near the shoulder.

She felt her fingers being forced open. She felt the baby going from her.

No! she screamed just as her hands came loose.

She would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby's other arm. She caught the baby around the wrist and leaned back.

But he would not let go. He felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard.

In this manner, the issue was decided.

Gerard Manley Hopkins: Pied Beauty (1880, published 1918)

Glory be to God for dappled things –
  For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
    For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
  Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
    And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
  Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
    With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
      Praise him.

William Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra (1606, first published in 1623)

[Enter DEMETRIUS and PHILO.]

PHILO: Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.

[Flourish. Enter ANTONY, CLEOPATRA, her LADIES, the train, with EUNUCHS fanning her.]

Look where they come:
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.

CLEOPATRA: If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

ANTONY: There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.

CLEOPATRA: I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

ANTONY: Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

You can read a close reading of this text by Emma Smith on page 171.

Robert Macfarlane: The Old Ways (2012)

Two days short of the winter solstice; the turn of the year's tide. All that cold day, the city and the countryside around felt halted, paused. Five degrees below freezing and the earth battened down. Clouds held snow that would not fall. Out in the suburbs the schools were closed, people homebound, the pavements rinky and the roads black-iced. The sun ran a shallow arc across the sky. Then just before dusk the snow came – dropping straight for five hours and settling at a steady inch an hour.

I was at my desk that evening, trying to work but distracted by the weather. I kept stopping, standing, looking out of the window. The snow was sinking through the orange cone cast by a street light, the fat flakes showing like furnace sparks.

Around eight o'clock the snow ceased. An hour later I went for a walk with a flask of whisky to keep me warm. I walked for half a mile along dark back roads where the snow lay clean and unmarked. The houses began to thin out. A few undrawn curtains: family evenings underway, the flicker and burble of television sets. The cold like a wire in the nose. A slew of stars, the moon flooding everything with silver.

At the southerly fringe of the suburb, a last lamp post stands by a hawthorn hedge, and next to it is a hole in the hedge which leads to a modest field path.

I followed the field path east-south-east towards a long chalk hilltop, visible as a whaleback in the darkness. Northwards was the glow of the city, and the red blip of aircraft warning lights from towers and cranes. Dry snow squeaed underfoot. A fox crossed the field to my west at a trot. The moonlight was so bright that everything cast a crisp moon-shadow: black on white, stark as woodcut. Wands of dogwood made zebra-hide of the path; hawthorn threw a lattice. The trees were frilled with snow, which lay to the depth of an inch of more on branches and twigs. The snow caused everything to exceed itself and the moonlight caused everything to double itself.

This is the path I've probably walked more often than any other in my lfe. It's a young way; maybe fifty years old, no more. Its easterly hedge is mostly hawthorn and around eight feet high; its westerly hedge is a younger mix of blackthorn, hawthorn, hazel and dogwood. It is not normally a beautiful place, but there's a feeling of secrecy to it that I appreciate, hedged in as it is on both sides, and running discreetly as it does between field and road. In summer I've seen small rolling clouds of goldfinches rising from teasel-heads and then curling ahead to settle again, retreating in the measure that I approach them.

That evening the path was a grey snow alley, and I followed it up to the hanger of beech trees that tops the whaleback hill, passing off the clay and onto the chalk proper. At the back brink of the beech wood I ducked through an ivy-trailed gap, and was into the forty-acre field that lies beyond.

At first sight the field seemed flawless; floe country. Then I set out across it and started to see the signs. The snow was densely printed with the tracks of birds and animals – archives of the hundreds of journeys made since the snow had stopped. There were neat deer slots, partridge prints like arrowheads pointing the way, and the pads of rabbits. Lines of tracks curved away from me across the field, disappearing into shadow or hedge. The moonlight, falling at a slant, deepened the dark in the nearer tracks so that they appeared full as inkwells To all these marks I added my own.

The snow was overwhelmingly legible. Each print-trail seemed like a plot that could

be read backwards in time; a series of allusions to events since ended. I found a line of fox pugs, which here and there had been swept across by the fox's brush, as if it had been trying to erase evidence of its own passage. I discovered what I supposed were the trances of a pheasant taking off: trenched footprints where it had pushed up, then spaced feather-presses either side of the tracks, becoming progressively lighter and then vanishing altogether.

You can read a close reading of this text by Ray Cluley on page 176.

William Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra (See page 113)

Reading by Emma Smith

In these opening lines of *Antony and Cleopatra* we can see the play's characteristic hyperbole – overstatement – and its abiding interest in binary oppositions that are breached or which collapse into each other.

Antony is introduced as a warrior: we get not his name but his ranks: 'general', 'captain', even Mars, the god of war. The scale is epic: his warrior's heart could not be contained by 'the buckles on his breast' armour; he is the 'triple pillar of the world'; the lovers need 'new heaven, new earth' to contain or measure their love. These excesses are placed in opposition to words suggesting moderation or limit: 'measure', 'temper', 'reckoned', 'bourn'. At the beginning of Philo's speech, exceeding that 'measure' is disreputable: the connotations of 'dotage', suggestive of excessive love and perhaps also of old age, are negative ones, and the verbs 'bend' and 'turn' also become suggestive of wavering purpose. To Philo (his name, appropriately, means 'loving', although it's never spoken in the play itself, just in its textual apparatus), Antony is already ruined: the fall from greatness we might expect to take the entire tragedy is narrated in its first ten lines. Words suggestive of fluidity or changeability – 'o'erflows', 'now bend, now turn', 'burst', 'transformed' – are set against those suggesting rigidity: 'files and musters', 'plated'. As the play unfolds, this binary is in part legible as a difference between Egyptian and Roman values: Antony's embrace of excess here confirms Philo's complaint that he is 'transformed' from soldier to lover, and the derogatory reference to Cleopatra's otherness in 'gipsy' and 'tawny', show how he is changed.

It's striking, though, that Philo's description of Antony's military bravery – his heart 'hath burst/ The buckles on his breast' – already suggests in his general a capacity for excess that has merely been transferred from the battlefield to the bedroom. In that context, 'temper', which means to soften or to adjust, carries something of its other meaning of 'anger', collocated with 'war', 'scuffles of great fights', and perhaps also 'bellows'. Words themselves can shift across that excess/control binary.

Just as Antony's 'goodly eyes' have been turned towards Cleopatra, so too the passage directs the play's audience to look on the spectacle: 'Look', 'behold and see'. The stage direction echoes Philo's description of Antony as a 'fan' by bringing in the 'eunuchs fanning her'. The soldier suggests that the object of our gaze is Antony ('you shall see in him'), but Cleopatra's dominance is suggested when she is the first to speak. In their four-line exchange, she prompts and he replies: a model for their relationship? Cleopatra's concern is with being loved and prompting Antony to declare it, rather than with loving: 'if it be love', 'to be beloved'. Editors sometimes add *[to Antony]* before her two speeches here, but it may also be that she speaks more publicly and less intimately, with a sense of performance (there are at least ten people on stage) just as their relationship is always conducted amid a crowded stage. The play's opening thus frames the central couple within a narrative of excess, decadence, and decline. The stage is set for the tragedy.

Robert Macfarlane: The Old Ways (See page 151)

Reading by Ray Cluley

The most striking aspect of this extract is Macfarlane's use of setting. He begins with an elliptical sentence which serves to quickly provide a winter time setting for all that follows, using a metaphor to refer to it as the 'turn of the year's tide' to support the idea of a natural cycle. Post-modifiers like the wonderful 'rinky' and the compound 'black-iced' chill the reader and suggest a treacherous landscape. Lucky for Macfarlane, he's safe inside looking out, a first-person perspective granting the scene a personal quality as he confesses to being distracted by the view. The image of an orange cone of streetlight is particularly evocative here, with an alliterative simile – 'fat flakes showing like furnace sparks' – offering a striking contrast in its comparison, an opposition of hot and cold as if to emphasis the contrast of indoors and outside.

When Macfarlane steps out into the cold he offers striking details that engage the reader, putting us in his place. We see and hear 'the flicker and burble of television sets', we feel 'the cold like a wire in the nose', while the silver moonlight grants the scene an ethereal beauty that seems other-worldly even as we relate to it as our own. His metaphors continue this idea; a hilltop as a 'whaleback in the darkness' and the path a 'zebra-hide' of stripes are again natural images but they're out of place in this country scene.

As the extract comes to an end, Macfarlane focuses his attention on the snow. The alliteration in 'at first sight the field seemed flawless; floe country' uses soft 'f' sounds to add a quiet hush to the scene but it quickly becomes very visual, the snow 'densely printed with the tracks of birds and animals'. Interestingly, the metaphor here becomes an extended one; footprints are 'archives', deep with shadows 'so that they appeared full as inkwells', the snow 'overwhelmingly legible'. The landscape of the extract has become something we can read, and not only in the sense that Macfarlane is describing it in his writing. Print-trails are 'like a plot that could be read backwards in time', though a fox tries to erase the trace of its passing with its tail. As well as suggesting the world is a narrative for those willing to look closely, Macfarlane points at the transient nature of the world – seasons come and go and animals pass unnoticed by most of us, while the image of pheasant prints fading, 'becoming progressively lighter and then vanishing altogether', stands as a poignant metaphor for life as fleeting, not in any melancholy way but rather in the sense that Macfarlane urges us to pay attention, to really see the world around us as we walk its paths.