

CHAPTER 3

THE PARAPHRASE

A paraphrase is a restatement in prose of the content of a poem in such a way as to keep the meaning while changing the diction and form—using your own writing, avoiding exact quotation. In addition the use of paraphrase is a good test of your understanding of the poem you have read, for the purpose of clarity but the music and images are lost. In fact the poetry is lost. (Holman, 1986, p.359)

How to write a paraphrase:

The paraphrase requires a careful reading. To paraphrase a poem (Perrine, 1963, p.26) therefore, is to restate or to rephrase it in different language. The paraphrase simplifies so as to make its prose sense as plain as possible. The paraphrase may be longer or shorter than the poem, but it should contain as much as possible, all the ideas in the poem in such a way as to make them clear to a puzzled reader. Figurative language should be reduced when possible to literal language; metaphors should be turned into similes. You should, in general, use your own language though it is neither necessary nor possible to avoid using any word occurring in the original. Thus a paraphrase is useful only if you understand that it is the barest, most inadequate approximation of what the poem really “says”.

The step-by-step procedure, outlined below, will show how to approach the paraphrase.

1. Read the material
 - 1.1 Read the poem through once to get the central meaning
 - 1.2 Look up any words you do not understand

1.3 Reread the selection at least two more times. Think of simple words to substitute for any long or difficult ones

2. Write the paraphrase.

2.1 Follow the same order that the poet uses in presenting the ideas.

2.2 Put the poem into your own words. Shorten long sentences. Use simple vocabulary.

2.3 Check your paraphrase to be sure that it expresses the ideas of the original.

Examples of poetry paraphrasing:

Here is a verse from a poem by the Elizabethan, Thomas Nashe, from **Summer' s Last Will and Testament**, It was written during an outbreak of the plague:

Beauty is but a flower,
Which wrinkles will devour,
Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die :
Lord, have mercy on us.

Source : (Scannell, 1983, p.12)

A prose paraphrase of these lines would run something like this : "
"Beauty is frail and will wither like a flower. It is getting dark. Young and beautiful queens have met premature deaths. Helen of Troy is dead. I am ill and I shall certainly die. God help us".

Another examples from the following poetic excerpts or a poem.
The first one is the original, the second is the paraphrase.

It Is Not Growing Like A Tree

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make Man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:

A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night;
It was the plant and flower of Light.
In small proportions we just beauties see;
And in short measures life may perfect be.

Ben Jonson (1573-1637)

Source : (Perrine, 1963, pp.25-26)

The general meaning of this poem is approximately this : Life is to be measured by its excellence, not by its length. The poem may be paraphrased as follows:

A man does not become more excellent by simple growing in size, as a tree grows, nor by merely living for a very long time, as an oak does, only to die at length, old, bald, and wizened. A lily which lives only for one day in the spring is far more estimable than the long lived tree, even though it dies at nightfall, for while it lives it is the essence and crown of beauty and excellence. Thus we may see perfect beauty in a small thing. Thus human life, too, may be most excellent though very brief.

The Daffodils

Original : I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Then thousand saw I at a glance
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance .

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Source : (Alexander, 1967, pp.46-47)

Paraphrase: I walked alone, without much purpose, like a cloud slowly moving over hills and along valleys. Suddenly I saw a great number of golden yellow daffodils. Underneath some trees near a lake, they seemed to be fluttering and dancing in the light wind. There were so many flowers that they seemed to be like the numberless stars of the Milky Way stretching in an unending line along the edge of a bay.

Andrew Marvell begins his poem, "**To His Coy Mistress**" with an elaborate statement of how he would court his beloved if their lives were measured in centuries rather than years. In the second stanza, he describes the reality:

An excerpt from "**To His Coy Mistress**"

Original : But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,

And your quaint honor turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)

Source : (Winterrowd, 1975, pp.196-197)

Paraphrase : However, I am always aware of the brevity of life, and I know that before us lies the eternity of death. Then your beauty will no longer exist, nor, in the vaults where your body lies, will my song echo. Only worms will attack the virgin body whose chastity has been preserved for so long, a proud chastity which will itself be dust, as my desire for you will be reduced to ashes. The grave presents a gracious and private setting, but we'll have no chance for love, no couple embraces there.

Here, **Time**, **eternity**, **honor**, and **lust** are all vague abstractions. But Marvel joins each to a sensuous image that gives to the abstraction an extraordinary sharpness and power! Time is a winged **chariot**, **eternity** a sequence of **deserts**, **honor** turns to **dust** and **lust** to **ashes**.

An excerpt from “**To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time**”

Original : Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
 Old time is still a-flying,
 And this same flower that smiles today,
 Tomorrow will be dying.

Robert Herrick (1591-1674),

Source : (Palgrave, 1956, p.89)

Paraphrase : Roses are best picked as buds; similarly youth is the best time to enjoy yourself while you can because time passes quickly like a flower which blooms today and dies tomorrow.

An excerpt from: “The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls”

Original : Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow(1807-1882)

Source : (Wolfe, Weiner, & McPartland, 1977, p.14)

Paraphrase : When the night comes, the roofs and the walls are covered with darkness. The sea is flowing continually. When the wave meets the shore it will wipe out all footprints there. Nothing can stop the tide from rising and falling.

“There Is No Frigate like a Book”

Original : There is no Frigate like a Book
 To take us Lands away,
Nor any Coursers like a Page
 Of prancing Poetry.
This Traverse may the poorest take
 Without oppress of Toll;
How frugal is the Chariot
 That bears a Human soul

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Source : (Perrine, 1963, p.33)

Paraphrase : If you want to travel from place to place, there is no ship, nor horse which can take you to that place as fast as a book. Traveling by reading books can be done by anyone even the poorest people because they do not have to pay any money. Reading books also brings wide knowledge to the readers.

The Sick Rose

Original : O rose, thou art sick!
 The invisible worm
 That flies in the night,
 In the howling storm,

 Has found out thy bed
 Of crimson joy,
 And his dark secret love
 Does thy life destroy.

William Blake (1757-1827)

Source : (Alexander, 1967, p.3)

Paraphrase : A rose has been attacked on a stormy night by a cankerworm.(A worm may symbolize any corrupting agent which destroys something beautiful by feeding upon it or making love to it).

Conclusion

A paraphrase is a statement of the meaning of a piece of writing using different vocabulary and sentence structure but as close as possible to the meaning of the original. This often involves expanding the original text in order to make the sense clear, a poem may be paraphrased in prose. There are two steps in the process of paraphrasing: read the poem

thoroughly to get the central meaning i.e. interpret, analyze, define, organize ideas and then write a paraphrase in your own words.

Excerpts from Poems for Practice

Paraphrase the poetic excerpts from the poems below.

A) Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), from "The Passionate Shepherd To His Love"

Source : (Palgrave, 1956, p.4)

B) The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
An his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears were like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), from "The Destruction of Sennacherib"

Source : (Alexander, 1967, p.34)

C) Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part;
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly I myself can free;

Michael Drayton (1563-1631), from sonnet : "Since There's No Help"

Source : (Palgrave, 1956, p.29)

D) I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;

Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;

W.B.Yeats (1865-1939), from "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death"

Source : (Alexander, 1967, p.27)

E) Fair daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon:
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attained his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run.
But to the evensong;
And, having prayed together, we
Will go with you along.

Robert Herrick (1591 - 1634), from "To Daffodils"

Source : (Alexander, 1967, pp.5-6)