

TEXT ANALYSIS 6: ONCE UPON A RIVER

A river on a map is a simple thing. Our river starts at Trewsbury Mead, and follows a course of some two hundred and thirty-six miles to reach the sea at Shoeburyness. But anyone who takes the trouble to follow its route, whether by boat or on foot, cannot help being aware that, furlong by furlong, singleness of direction is not its most obvious feature.

5 En route the river does not seem particularly intent on reaching its destination. Instead it winds its way in timewasting loops and diversions. Its changes of direction are frequently teasing: on its journey it heads at different times north, south and west, as though it has forgotten its easterly destination – or put it aside for the while. At Ashton Keynes it splits into so many rivulets that every house in the village must have a bridge to its own front door; later, around Oxford, it takes a great unhurried detour around the city. It has other capricious tricks up its sleeve: in places it slows to drift lazily in wide pools before recovering its urgency and speeding on again. At Buscot it splits into twin streams to maroon a lengthy piece of territory, then regathers its water into a single channel.

15 If this is hard to understand from a map, the rest is harder. For one thing, the river that flows ever onwards is also seeping sideways, irrigating the fields and land to one side and the other. It finds its way into wells and is drawn up to launder petticoats and be boiled for tea. It is absorbed into root membranes, travels up cell by cell to the surface, is held in the leaves of watercress that find themselves in the soup bowls and on the cheeseboards of the county's diners. From teapot or soup dish, it passes into mouths, irrigates complex
20 internal biological networks that are worlds in themselves, before returning eventually to the earth, via a chamber pot. Elsewhere the river water clings to the leaves of the willows that droop to touch its surface, and then when the sun comes up a droplet appears to vanish into the air, where it travels invisibly and might join a cloud, a vast floating lake, until it falls again as rain. This is the unmappable journey of the Thames.

25 And there is more. What we see on a map is only the half of it. A river no more begins at its source than a story begins with the first page. Take Trewsbury Mead, for instance. That photograph, do you remember? The one they were so quick to dismiss, because it wasn't picturesque? An ordinary ash in an ordinary field, they said, and so it appears, but look more closely. See this indentation in the ground, at the foot of the tree? See how it is the beginning of a furrow, shallow, narrow and unremarkable, that runs away from the tree
30 and out of the picture altogether? See here, in the dip, where something catches the light and shows as a few ragged patches of silver in the grey shades of muddy soil? Those bright marks are water, seeing sunlight for the first time in what might be a very long time. It comes from underground, where in all the spaces beneath our feet, in the fractures and voids in the rock, in caverns and fissures and channels, there are waterways as numerous,
35 as meandering, as circuitous as anything above ground. The beginning of the Thames is not the beginning – or rather it is only to us that it seems like a beginning.

In fact, Trewsbury Mead might not be the beginning in any case. There are those who say it's the wrong place. The not-even-the-beginning is not here but elsewhere, at a place
40 called Seven Springs, which is the source of the Churn, a river that joins the Thames at Cricklade. And who is to say? The Thames that goes north, south, east and west to finally go east, that seeps to one side and the other as it moves forwards, that goes slow as it goes fast, that evaporates into the sky whilst meandering to the sea, is more about motion than

45 about beginnings. If it has a beginning, it is located in a dark, inaccessible place. Better study where it goes than where it comes from.

Ah, tributaries! That's what I was meaning to come to. The Churn, the Key, the Ray, the Coln, the Leach and the Cole: in the upper reaches of the Thames, these are the streams and rivulets that come from elsewhere to add their own volume and momentum. And tributaries are about to join this story. We might, in this quiet hour before dawn, leave this river and this long night and trace the tributaries back, to see not their beginnings –
50 mysterious, unknowable things – but, more simply, what they were doing yesterday.

The day before the coming of the child, at half past three in the afternoon, at a farmhouse in Kelmscott, a woman stepped out of the kitchen door and in some haste crossed the yard to the barn. Her fair curls were tucked neatly into her bonnet, and her blue dress was simple, as befits a busy farmer's wife, but she endowed it with a prettiness that suggested
55 she was still young at heart. She had a swaying gait; with every second step she stooped to the left, with every step in between she rose again. It did not slow her. Nor was she hindered by the patch that covered her right eye. It was made of the same blue fabric as her dress and a white ribbon held it in place.

60 She came to the barn. It smelt of blood and iron. Inside was a man who stood with his back to her. He was powerfully made, unusually tall, with a broad back and wiry black hair. As she put her hand on the door frame, he tossed a crimsonstained cloth to the ground and reached for his whetstone. She heard a ringing rise in the air as he started to sharpen the blade. Beyond him lay a row of corpses, neatly arranged snout to tail; the blood ran from
65 them and found the shallows in the ground.

'Dearest ...'

He turned. The darkness of his face was not the hale brown achieved by a lifetime's work out of doors under an English sun, but the kind that originated in another continent altogether. His nose was broad and his lips thick. At the sight of his wife, his brown eyes lit
70 up and he smiled.

(from Diane Setterfield, *Once Upon a River*)

Questions (Simulating Galicia 2018 – A)

1. Write a summary of this text. Write no more than 80 words. (1p)
2. Identify the social-cultural context and references justifying your answer with examples from the text. Write no more than 120 words. (1p)
3. Read this paragraph from the same novel and write the answer that best fits each gap. (1p)

Outside, Robert Armstrong finished sharpening his knife. He called his second and third sons, and together they 1. _____ the carcasses on to hooks to bleed them over the gulleys. They 2. _____ their hands in a pail of rainwater and emptied the water over the floor to wash the worst of the blood away from the slaughter area. When he had 3. _____ the boys to mopping, he went out to feed the pigs. They usually worked together, but on days when he had something on his mind he preferred to feed the pigs alone.

4. _____, Armstrong heaved sacks and spilt the grain into the 5. _____. He scratched one sow behind her ear, rubbed another on her flank, according to their individual 6. _____. Pigs are remarkable creatures and, though most men are too blind to see it, have intelligence that shows in their eyes. Armstrong was persuaded that every pig had its own character, its own talents, and when he selected a female piglet for breeding he looked not only for physical qualities but for intelligence, 7. _____, good sense: the qualities that make a good mother. He was in the habit of talking to his pigs as he fed them and today, as usual, he had something to say to each and every one. 'What have you got to be so grumpy about, Dora?' and 'Feeling your 8. _____, are you, Poll?' His gilts, the breeding sows, all had names. The pigs he was growing for the table he did not name, but called them all Piglet. When he chose a new gilt, it was his 9. _____ to give her a name starting with the same letter of the alphabet as her mother; it made it easy to 10. _____ the breeding line.

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|-----|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. | a) hoisted | b) lifted | c) rose | d) raised |
| 2. | a) washed | b) cleansed | c) rinsed | d) soaked |
| 3. | a) put | b) set | c) agreed | d) made |
| 4. | a) readily | b) hands down | c) becomingly | d) effortlessly |
| 5. | a) troughs | b) cribs | c) trenches | d) dikes |
| 6. | a) taste | b) liking | c) appreciation | d) relish |
| 7. | a) foresight | b) preparedness | c) prospect | d) clairvoyance |
| 8. | a) weather | b) life | c) time | d) age |
| 9. | a) custom | b) habit | c) ritual | d) practice |
| 10. | a) recall | b) call up | c) trace | d) summon |

4. Word formation. Use the word given in capitals to form a word that fits in the space in the same line. (1p)

The man's breath was slow and noisy. The air entering and leaving his lungs had to make its way past swollen membranes, through passages filled with drying blood whose paths had been altered and reset in the past hours. It was no wonder it made a sound like the teeth of a saw on wood. In the silences where his breath tipped from in to out, she could hear the 1. _____ (SUBSTANCE) flutter of the child's breath. Behind them both, in the background, the breath of the river, an endless exhalation.

She ought to sleep, but had been waiting to be alone to think. 2. _____ (METHOD), 3. _____ (PASSION), she went over it all again. She watched herself perform the routine checks, noted all the signs she had been trained to look for. Where was her mistake? Once, twice, three times she went through it all in close detail. She found no error. What then? Since her learning was of no use, she looked to her experience for elucidation. Had there ever been an instance when she had been unsure whether a patient was dead or alive? It was 4. _____ (COMMON) to say that a person was at death's door, as if there were some real line between life and death and a person might stand upon it for a time. But she had never in such circumstances had any difficulty in discerning which side of the line the patient was on. No matter how far illness had progressed, no matter how great the weakness, a patient was alive until the moment of death. There was no hovering. No 5. _____ (IN).

5. Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given without changing it. You must use between three and eight words, including the word given. (1p)

- a) It has other capricious tricks up its sleeve. (SECRETLY)

It has other capricious tricks _____

- b) But anyone who takes the trouble to follow its route [...] cannot help being aware that [...] singleness of direction is not its most obvious feature. (FLIES)

But anyone who takes the trouble to follow its route cannot help being aware that it's not common for it to go _____

- c) If it has a beginning, it is located in a dark, inaccessible place. (BEYOND)

If it has a beginning, it is _____

- d) Nor was she hindered by the patch that covered her right eye. (OINTMENT)

The patch that covered her right eye was _____
_____ for her.

- e) At the sight of his wife, his brown eyes lit up and he smiled. (CAUGHT)

When _____, his brown eyes lit up and he smiled.

6. Provide a word or phrase from the text for each of the following definitions. (1p)

- Shallow hole or cut in the surface or edge of something.
- Small plant with white flowers which grows in streams and pools. Its leaves taste hot and are eaten raw in salads.
- Unit of length that is equal to 220 yards or 201.2 metres.
- Referring to a manner that shows that a person/thing is not completely serious about what they are saying or doing.
- To be suitable or appropriate to a person or thing.
- The long nose of a pig.
- A particular way of walking.
- Healthy
- Diversion, usually not implying the shortest way to arrive at a place.
- Long, thin line in the earth which a farmer makes in order to plant seeds or to allow water to flow along.
- Pieces of clothing like thin skirts, which are worn under a skirt or dress.
- Mass of a moving object multiplied by its speed in a particular direction.
- When a liquid is flowing slowly and in small amounts into a place where it should not go.

7. PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION. Write the phonetic transcription of the following fragment from the text. (1p; - 0.1 each mistake)

It comes from underground, where in all the spaces beneath our feet, in the fractures and voids in the rock, in caverns and fissures and channels, there are waterways as numerous, as meandering, as circuitous as anything above ground. The beginning of the Thames is not the beginning.

ESSAY: Write about this topic (maximum 300 words) – Student housing used to be affordable. Why has it become an 'asset class' to enrich the already wealthy?