Possibilities for Writing

1. Analyze Plato's allegory carefully, then interpret it in your own words. What do the various elements of the allegory represent?
2. Near the end Plato refers to "shadows of images of justice" and "absolute justice." What does he mean? How do you respond to such images of "absolutes"?
3. Write an allegory of your own about perception and reality or another philosophical or psychological distinction that intrigues you.

Katherine Anne Porter (1890–1980) was born in Indian Creek, Texas, and raised by a grandmother after her mother died. She married and divorced while she was in her teens, then left Texas to work as a journalist in Chicago and other cities before settling in New York. She didn't publish her first collection of stories until she was forty; but Flowering Judas (1930) was an immediate critical success. This was followed by Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939) and The Leaning Tower (1944) and finally by Ship of Fools (1962), her only full-length novel. Her output was relatively small, but marked by meticulous craftsmanship, and her Collected Stories (1965) won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The Days Before, a collection of essays, appeared in 1952, and Collected Essays and Occasional Writings in 1971.

Katherine Anne Porter
The Necessary Enemy

In "The Necessary Enemy," Katherine Anne Porter provides an incisive analysis of romantic love. Porter presents a case study in a penetrating psychological analysis of the relationship between love and hatred in the heart of a prototypical young married woman. Porter enriches and complicates the psychological portrait by drawing on the young woman's childhood feelings of love and hate, and by including brief comments on the love-hate expressed by the woman's parents toward her and toward each other.

Porter's essay falls into two parts. In the first part, Porter describes how the young woman's illusions about love are shattered. Describing the interior life of the young woman, Porter explains the complexity of her responses toward her husband and herself, Porter conveys the young woman's fear at discovering the powerful feelings of hate that she harbors toward her husband.

In the second part of the essay, Porter generalizes from the case study of the first part. Here, she de-mythologizes the idea of love, claiming that love needs to be learned, whereas hatred comes naturally. Porter undermines the clichéd definition of romantic love as "changeless, faithful, passionate," its "sole and... to render the two lovers happy." She ridicules the ideal of romantically happy married couples, something that will make some readers uncomfortable.

Porter, however, is not entirely opposed to the idea of romantic love. She argues that it should be retained, but that it must be tempered by a strong dose of reality. And for this, Porter suggests that hatred is inevitable as a "necessary enemy and ally" of love. It's a tough-minded notion that concludes a brutally honest essay.

She is a frank, charming, fresh-hearted young woman who married for love. She and her husband are one of those gay, good-looking young pairs who ornament this modern scene rather more in profusion
perhaps than ever before in our history. They are handsome, with a talent for finding their way in their world, they work at things that interest them, their tastes agree and their hopes. They intend in all good faith to spend their lives together, to have children and do well by them and each other—to be happy, in fact, which for them is the whole point of their marriage. And all in stride, keeping their wits about them. Nothing romantic, mind you; their feet are on the ground.

Unless they were this sort of person, there would be not much point to what I wish to say; for they would seem to be an example of the high-spirited, right-minded young whom the critics are always invoking to come forth and do their duty and practice all those sterling old-fashioned virtues which in every generation seem to be falling into disrepair. As for virtues, these young people are more or less on their own, like most of their kind; they get very little moral or other aid from their society; but after three years of marriage this very contemporary young woman finds herself facing the oldest and ugliest dilemma of marriage.

She is dismayed, horrified, full of guilt and forebodings because she is finding out a little by little that she is capable of hating her husband, whom she loves faithfully. She can hate him at times as fiercely and mysteriously, indeed in terribly much the same way, as often she hated her parents, her brothers and sisters, whom she loves, when she was a child. Even then it had seemed to her a kind of black treacherousness in her, her private wickedness that, just the same, gave her her only private life. That was one thing her parents never knew about her, never seemed to suspect. For it was never given a name. They did and said hateful things to her and to each other as if by right, as if in them it was a kind of virtue. But when they said to her, “Control your feelings,” it was never when she was amiable and obedient, only in the black time of her hate. So it was her secret, a shameful one. When they punished her, sometimes for the strangest reasons, it was, they said, only because they loved her—it was for her good. She did not believe this, but she thought herself guilty of something worse than ever they had punished her for. None of this really frightened her: the real fright came when she discovered that at times her father and mother hated each other; this was like standing on the doorsill of a familiar room and seeing in a lightning flash that the floor was gone, you were on the edge of a bottomless pit. Sometimes she felt that both of them hated her, but that passed, it was simply not a thing to be thought of, much less believed.

She thought she had outgrown all this, but here it was again, an element in her own nature she could not control, or feared she could not. She would have to hide from her husband, if she could, the same spot in her feelings she had hidden from her parents, and for the same no doubt disreputable, selfish reason: she wants to keep his love.

Above all, she wants him to be absolutely confident that she loves him. For that is the real truth, no matter how unreasonable it sounds, and no matter how her own feelings betray them both at times. She depends recklessly on his love; yet while she is hating him, he might very well be hating her as much or even more, and it would serve her right. But she does not want to be served right, she wants to be loved and forgiven—that is, to be sure he would forgive her anything, if he had any notion of what she had done. But best of all she would like not to have anything in her love that should ask forgiveness. She doesn’t mean about their quarrels—they are not so bad. Her feelings are out of proportion, perhaps. She knows it is perfectly natural for people to disagree, have fits of temper, fight it out; they learn quite a lot about each other that way, and not all of it disappointing either. When it passes, her hatred seems quite unreal. It always did.

Love. We are early taught to say it. I love you. We are trained to the thought of it as if there were nothing else, or nothing else worth having without it, or nothing worth having which it could not bring with it. Love is taught, always by precept, sometimes by example. Then hate, which no one meant to teach us, comes of itself. It is true that if we say I love you, it may be received with doubt, for there are times when it is hard to believe. Say I hate you, and the one spoken to believes it instantly, once for all.

Say I love you a thousand times to that person afterward and mean it every time, and still it does not change the fact that once we said I hate you, and meant that too. It leaves a mark on that surface love had worn so smooth with its eternal caresses. Love must be learned, and learned again and again: there is no end to it. Hate needs no instruction, but waits only to be provoked. . . . hate, the unspoken word, the acknowledged presence in the house, that faint smell of brimstone among the roses, that invisible tongue-tripper, that unkempt finger in every pie, that sudden oh-so-curiously chilling look—could it be boredom?—on your dear one’s features, making them quite ugly. Be careful: love, perfect love, is in danger.
If it is not perfect, it is not love, and if it is not love, it is bound to be hate sooner or later. This is perhaps a not too exaggerated statement of the extreme position of Romantic Love, more especially in America, where we are all brought up on it, whether we know it or not. Romantic Love is changeless, faithful, passionate, and its sole end is to render the two lovers happy. It has no obstacles save those provided by the hazards of fate (that is to say, society), and such sufferings as the lovers may cause each other are only another word for delight: exciting jealousies, thrilling uncertainties, the ritual dance of courtship within the charmed closed circle of their secret alliance; all real troubles come from without, they face them unitedly in perfect confidence. Marriage is not the end but only the beginning of true happiness, cloudless, changeless to the end. That the candidates for this blissful condition have never seen an example of it, nor ever knew anyone who had, makes no difference. That is the ideal and they will achieve it.

How did Romantic Love manage to get into marriage at last, where it was most certainly never intended to be? At its highest it was tragic: the love of Héloïse and Abélard. At its most graceful, it was the homage of the trouvère for his lady. In its most popular form, the adulterous straying of solidly married couples who meant to stray for their own good reasons, but at the same time do nothing to upset the property settlements or the line of legitimacy; at its most trivial, the pretty trilling of shepherd and shepherdess.

This was generally condemned by church and state and a word of fear to honest wives whose mortal enemy it was. Love within the sober, sacred realities of marriage was a matter of personal luck, but in any case, private feelings were strictly a private affair having, at least in theory, no bearing whatever on the fixed practice of the rules of an institution never intended as a recreation ground for either sex. If the couple discharged their religious and social obligations, furnished forth a copious progeny, kept their troubles to themselves, maintained public civility and died under the same roof, even if not always on speaking terms, it was rightly regarded as a successful marriage. Apparently this testing ground was too severe for all but the stoutest spirits; it too was based on an ideal, as impossible in its way as the ideal Romantic Love. One good thing to be said for it is that society took responsibility for the conditions of marriage, and the sufferers within its bonds could always blame the system, not themselves. But Romantic Love crept into the marriage bed, very stealthily, by centuries, bringing its absurd notions about love as eternal springtime and marriage as a personal adventure meant to provide personal happiness. To a Western romantic such as I, though my views have been much modified by painful experience, it still seems to me a charming work of the human imagination, and it is a pity its central notion has been taken too literally and has hardened into a convention as cramping and enslaving as the older one. The refusal to acknowledge the evils in ourselves which therefore are implicit in any human situation is as extreme and unworkable a proposition as the doctrine of total depravity; but somewhere between them, or maybe beyond them, there does exist a possibility for reconciliation between our desires for impossible satisfactions and the simple unalterable fact that we also desire to be unhappy and that we create our own sufferings; and out of these sufferings we salvage our fragments of happiness.

Our young woman who has been taught that an important part of her human nature is not real because it makes trouble and interferes with her peace of mind and shakes her self-love, has been very badly taught; but she has arrived at a most important stage of her re-education. She is afraid her marriage is going to fail because she has not love enough to face its difficulties; and this because at times she feels a painful hostility toward her husband, and cannot admit its reality because such an admission would damage in her own eyes her view of what love should be, an absurd view, based on her vanity of power. Her hatred is real as her love is real, but her hatred has the advantage at present because it works on a blind instinctual level, it is lawless; and her love is subjected to a code of ideal conditions, impossible by their very nature of fulfillment, which prevents its free growth and deprives it of its right to recognize its human limitations and come to grips with them. Hatred is natural in a sense that love, as she conceives it, a young person brought up in the tradition of Romantic Love, is not natural at all. Yet it did not come by hazard, it is the very imperfect expression of the need of the human imagination to create beauty and harmony out of chaos, no matter how mistaken its notion of these things may be, nor how clumsy its methods. It has conjured love out of the air, and seeks to preserve it by incantations; when she spoke a vow to love and honor her husband until death, she did a very reckless thing, for it is not possible by an act of the will to fulfill such an engagement. But it was the necessary act of faith.
performed in defense of a mode of feeling, the statement of honorable intention to practice as well as she is able the noble, acquired faculty of love, that very mysterious overtone to sex which is the best thing in it. Her hatred is part of it, the necessary enemy and ally.

Possibilities for Writing

1. Explain what Porter means by love, “Romantic Love,” and hate. Why does she believe that hate is a “necessary evil”?

2. Near the end Porter writes, “The refusal to acknowledge the evils in ourselves which therefore are implicit in any human situation is as extreme and unworkable a proposition as the doctrine of total depravity; but somewhere between them, or maybe beyond them, there does exist a possibility for reconciliation between our desires for impossible satisfactions and the simple unalterable fact that we also desire to be unhappy and that we create our own sufferings; and out of the sufferings we salvage our fragments of happiness.” How do you interpret this passage? How do you respond to it?

3. This essay was written at a time when divorce was becoming more common but not nearly so prevalent as it is today. When many experts are decrying its effects. What are your thoughts on marriage and divorce? Have they been influenced by Porter in any way? Why or why not?

Anna Quindlen

Between the Sexes, A Great Divide

In “Between the Sexes, A Great Divide,” Anna Quindlen describes the gulf that separates boys and girls, men and women. She begins with the image of the empty space in the middle of a junior high school dance floor, girls huddled together on one side of the room, boys clustered on the other. Quindlen returns to this image later in the essay, using it to suggest the ways men and women live in separate and differentiated mental and emotional spaces.

Although Quindlen plays up the ways that men and women, girls and boys are divided from one another, she finds a way to reconcile their gender differences. Quindlen suggests that the two sexes do indeed eventually come together as partners, first on their school dance floor and later as married couples. And it is the dances both literal and figurative, she observes, not the differences, that matter.

A brief essay originally written for her syndicated newspaper column in the New York Times, “Between the Sexes, A Great Divide,” is both humorous and provocative. Quindlen takes a familiar subject and a common idea and invites readers to think not only about gender differences but also about how the two sexes manage to get together at all.

Perhaps we all have the same memory of the first boy-girl party we attended. The floors were waxed, the music loud, the air thick with the smell of cologne. The boys stood on one side of the room and the girls on the other, each affecting a nonchalance belied by the shuffling male loafers and the occasional high birdlike sound of a female giggle.