

Allegory

Jeremy Tambling



The New Critical Idiom

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ALLEGORY

Indispensable to an understanding of medieval and Renaissance texts and a topic of controversy for the Romantic poets, allegory remains a site for debate in the twenty-first century.

In this useful guide, Jeremy Tambling:

- presents a concise history of allegory, providing numerous examples from medieval forms to the present day
- considers the relationship between allegory and symbolism
- analyses the use of allegory in modernist debate and deconstruction, looking at critics such as Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man
- provides a full glossary of technical terms.

Allegory offers an accessible, clear introduction to the history and use of this complex literary device. It is the ideal tool for all those seeking a greater understanding of texts that make use of allegory and of the significance of allegorical thinking to literature.

Jeremy Tambling is Professor of Literature at the University of Manchester, and author of several books on literature and literary and cultural theory. His most recent books include *RE:Verse: Turning towards Poetry* (2007) and *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (2008).

THE NEW CRITICAL IDIOM

SERIES EDITOR: JOHN DRAKAKIS, UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

The New Critical Idiom is an invaluable series of introductory guides to today's critical terminology. Each book:

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- offers an original and distinctive overview by a leading literary and cultural critic
- relates the term to the larger field of cultural representation.

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The New Critical Idiom is a series of introductory books which seeks to extend the lexicon of literary terms, in order to address the radical changes which have taken place in the study of literature during the last decades of the twentieth century. The aim is to provide clear, well-illustrated accounts of the full range of terminology currently in use, and to evolve histories of its changing usage.

The current state of the discipline of literary studies is one where there is considerable debate concerning basic questions of terminology. This involves, among other things, the boundaries which distinguish the literary from the non-literary; the position of literature within the larger sphere of culture; the relationship between literatures of different cultures; and questions concerning the relation of literary to other cultural forms within the context of interdisciplinary studies.

It is clear that the field of literary criticism and theory is a dynamic and heterogeneous one. The present need is for individual volumes on terms which combine clarity of exposition with an adventurousness of perspective and a breadth of application. Each volume will contain as part of its apparatus some indication of the direction in which the definition of particular terms is likely to move, as well as expanding the disciplinary boundaries within which some of these terms have been traditionally contained. This will involve some re-situation of terms within the larger field of cultural representation, and will introduce examples from the area of film and the modern media in addition to examples from a variety of literary texts.

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INTRODUCTION

I could never understand allegories. The two words in the language I most respect are yes and no.

(Henry James, 1995:235)

Until recently, modern study of literature paid little attention to allegory, unless specialist work was being done on a religious, ‘serious’ writer like Spenser, or Langland, or Bunyan. Reading for allegory was regarded as getting in the way of an immediate response to a text, missing out on its vital, literal sense. The attitude of Mrs Touchett, the commonsensical American in Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), was typical, and still is with some: it likes a plain ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Even medievalists played down the presence of allegory in medieval texts, where its presence could be expected. Allegorical implications in later texts, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) or George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) were regarded as special cases. The old prejudice against allegory was both that it insisted on putting one thing in the place of another, saying that A meant B, and that this connection was rigidly, and rather abstractly, coded.

The situation is different now. Realism as a literary technique no longer seems so much to be a ‘natural’ form of writing, but has come under intense scrutiny as something artificial in its own way. Allegory has been reclaimed as a term within recent debates in literary and cultural studies. The assumption that it is an artificial device no longer seems so problematic, so that the word is now more prominent in literary use than it has been for some time. ‘Allegory’ has a broad set of meanings, but, since these have shifted in the last thirty years or so, there is now no consensus on how to approach it. Newer approaches, for example those associated with Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man, threaten to unsettle older senses of allegory altogether.

This book begins with examples of allegory, and then defines it abstractly, while definitions of technical terms used throughout appear in the glossary. The introduction considers some of the problems of allegory, before I look at its history in subsequent chapters; here I consider how allegory, though it exploits a punning and deceptive aspect of language, nevertheless is associated with great seriousness, and embodies abstract ideas. The introduction concludes with the question of the difference between reading for the literal sense and reading allegorically. Perhaps giving a definition of allegory may be misleading: perhaps there is no definite thing called ‘allegory’, only forms of writing more or less ‘allegorical’. What is meant by ‘allegory’ within the discourses included in the ‘new critical idiom’ ranges, perhaps, from defining certain specific texts or types of texts, to claiming that all literature, and all writing, is allegorical.

The first example of allegory is taken from the opening of one of the most famous allegories of all:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.

(In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost.)

(Sinclair, 1948a: 22–23)

The speaker begins in the middle of a wood where he is lost, and since he does not

explain how he came there, the poem also starts in the middle. The first line indicates a time: when he was thirty-five, having journeyed halfway through the seventy years of the Bible's specification of the life of man (Psalm 90.10). Life as a journey means that a temporal process is being explained as a movement from place to place. That is allegorical: putting one thing (time) in terms of another (space), and it appears at the beginning of another allegory, where life is explained by another term, a journey, drawing to the reader's attention the movement from one stage of life to the next (he has been young, he will be old). The text begins not at the beginning, but in the middle of this. The 'I' is already inside a wood full of shadows, caused by the loss of light, and has begun to realize it. The second line identifies a physical location and emphasizes the speaker's own self-reflective stance: 'I found myself, I came to myself'. The third line extends the metaphor of the journey in recognizing that 'life' is no longer a straight road, and that what was once perceived to be direct and right is now not so; this carries with it a series of moral implications (the light which is lost is good, desirable, and no longer attainable). The dark wood expresses an inner turmoil: if the road is lost, so is the 'I', with regard to his inner life which is portrayed in the figure of the wood.

This allegory, the opening of Dante's *Inferno*, and so the beginning of the entire *Commedia* (c.1310–21) begins 'in the middle' and moves sequentially from there. It seems that in saying 'mi ritrovai' – 'I found myself' – the middle of his life turns out to mean all his life; there is no sense of any origin of life, so that the origin is no more than a dark forest. Dante (1265–1321) writes about the year 1300 in the first line, and looks back to that date. The writing develops as a narrative through time, putting everything into a *metonymic* sequence, where one thing follows another in time, displacing what has gone before. Before leaving Dante for a further example, it should also be said that he is not only a very complex allegorist but a theorist of allegory; how this impacts on the *Commedia* appears in [chapter 1](#).

The following quotation provides an example of another form of allegory, from the opening of *The Nether World* (1889), a novel about working-class London life, by George Gissing (1857–1903). An old man walks through Clerkenwell Green, past a burial-ground, and comes to an 'arched gateway closed with black doors':

He looked at the gateway, then fixed his gaze upon something that stood just above – something which the dusk half concealed, and by so doing, made more impressive. It was the sculptured counterfeit of a human face, that of a man distraught with agony. The eyes stared wildly from their sockets, the hair struggled in maniac disorder, the forehead was wrung with torture, the cheeks sunken, the throat fear-somely wasted, and from the wide lips there seemed to be issuing a horrible cry. Above this hideous effigy was carved the legend: 'MIDDLESEX HOUSE OF CORRECTION'.

(Gissing, 1992:2)

The man stands in front of a prison. The face sculpted above the doorway can be interpreted in several ways: as a figure of judgement, like a figure of the damned, as a mirror of the man looking at it, or as his other self. The face is an image of the madness the prison produces, on top of torture and pain, and shows what mental torment awaits inside. It shows the need of the society to supplement the prison with a visual representation of its horrors. The face personifies the prison, in such a way that the words which name the prison can be placed above it, and because no cry of horror issues from the lips of the statue it seems to be also a figure of death. The imagined cry makes a joke out of the epigraph, 'Middlesex House of Correction': it is ironic for

correction to produce horror. The contorted face shows what correction in this society really means.

Gissing places this sculpted head at the beginning of his book with as much deliberateness as the prison architects. The image indicates what awaits in *The Nether World*, both for its inhabitants, who, though outside, are like the people in prison, and for the reader, who is like the man 'reading' the sculpture. The title of the book is also allegorical, suggesting that conditions in nineteenth-century working-class London are like those in Dante's Hell, so that the allegorical, Laocoon-like face supplements another allegory. This allegorical image is *metaphorical* in character: it creates a sense of a resemblance which is not consciously remarked on, nor is it developed later by association with anything else. It does not work metonymically, linking one idea to another, so it is unlike Dante's allegory.

The face supplements the message the prison's physical existence conveys by providing a particularized, horrific image of it. And 'image' suggests that the head, because it stands for it, symbolizes the prison, while a prison is both a real structure of bricks and mortar to contain people and an abstraction, a state of confinement, which does not necessarily imply that the person feeling such confinement must be physically imprisoned. Gissing, like Dickens before him, makes prison-existence allegorical of the conditions of modern urban, industrial, life in the conditions of nineteenth-century capitalism. The face, as an expressive mask, allegorizes both the actual, real prison and the allegorical one. While the disembodied, contorted face functions as a deterrent to wrongdoers, it also personifies everything the prison stands for. The connection between wrongdoing, incarceration, and the suffering that punishment produces, is seen in the mask as a simple personification of what the prison means. A series of several, but causally connected, meanings are unified in one image, one personification. Personification is a particular type of allegory, so particular that some critics question whether it should be thought of as allegory at all (Maresca, 1993:21–40). While taking up that argument later, I will, in order to present personification, assume throughout that it is an allegorical mode, providing concrete forms for complex, abstract ideas which it makes recognizable. This 'counterfeit of a human face' is artificial but it stands for everything the prison represents, from the abstract idea of justice to the concrete effects of its operation upon human inmates.

A third example gives a definition of allegory. In the comedy *The Rivals* (1775), by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), Mrs Malaprop says of another character, 'She's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile.' Mrs Malaprop's name, derived from the adjective 'malapropos' ('inopportune, inappropriate'— *OED*) has created a neologism: a 'malapropism', 'the ludicrous misuse of words, especially in mistaking a word for one like it' (*OED*). Her name declares her character, her linguistic mistake having several layers of meaning. She intends to say alligator, but says allegory; but she means crocodile, since alligators do not live in the Nile. The comparison she formulates for someone who is headstrong is inappropriate, and the result is an example of catachresis. These displacements of language provide a definition of what happens in allegory, for at its simplest, allegory is a way of saying one thing and meaning another; however, her observation fulfils a function of allegory in that she tries to establish a connection between human stubbornness ('headstrong') and a reptile noted for its fierce self-interest. She performs the process of allegory by

eliding ‘allegory’ and ‘alligator’ and ‘crocodile’ as the bearers of a universal human characteristic. Her choice of words, born out of geographical ignorance, inadvertently indicates what allegory does. ‘Allegory’ derives from the Greek word *allegoreo*, formed from *allos* (other) and *agoreuo*, (to speak in a place of assembly, the *agora*, the marketplace). The ‘other meaning’ of allegory may conceal a secret significance, in that it may persuade readers to probe for another meaning, it may enrich the meaning that has been given, or it may draw attention to a split between the surface meaning and what is underneath.

In the words ‘she’s as headstrong as an allegory’, the conjunction ‘as’ introduces a *simile*. If the words indicating that a comparison is being made are discarded, that is a *metaphor*. A metaphor sustained, and developed, is *allegory*. Allegory describes one thing under the image of another, or speaks one thing while implying something else. A simile keeps the two terms of the comparison apart: the headstrong woman / the alligator. In metaphor, the word has been transferred from its literal signification. The slash-line marking a difference between the two sides of the comparison has disappeared. The words are interchangeable, or an exchange takes place whereby one word replaces the other. A textbook simile comes from Robert Burns (1759–96):

O my Luve’s like a red, red rose
That’s newly sprung in June:
O my Luve’s like the melody
That’s sweetly play’d in tune ...

The simile is transformed into a metaphor, in William Blake’s ‘The Sick Rose’:

O Rose thou art sick!

That Blake (1757–1827) does not mean a literal rose is apparent from the apostrophe ‘O Rose’. The rose may be a woman, but it is not certain, for the poem is too open-ended for definition, although the pronoun ‘thou’ suggests a personification of the ‘rose’, the poem’s addressee.

An example of an allegory with a ‘rose’ theme is the French medieval poem *The Romance of the Rose*, begun by Guillaume de Lorris (c.1212–37) and finished by Jean de Meun (c.1237–1305). In its 21,780 lines, a Lover narrates his existence in the Garden of Delight, attempting to reach the Rose, who is the desired woman. Everyone in the Garden exists as a personification of qualities that either help or resist the Lover (Amant). For instance, the character of Fair Welcome (Bel Aceuil) stands for the spirit in the woman who is ready to yield to him, but Jealousy and Shame and Fear are also present, and Jealousy builds a castle to lock up Fair Welcome and the Rose. The meaning here is that the Lady’s jealousy over her lover’s faithfulness prevents her from being susceptible to him. The sustained nature of the personifications is sufficient to make this an allegory, but also, the reader is always being invited by the text to read it for secret, other meanings. *The Romance of the Rose* was immensely influential: on Dante, and on Chaucer (c.1340–1400), who translated it, and used it, especially in his dream-poetry. It also contributed to works of allegory central to literature of the sixteenth century, such as Spenser’s *The Faerie Quene*, to be discussed in [chapter 3](#). Paul de Man, whose theories of allegory will be discussed in [chapter 6](#), claims its influence on Rousseau in the eighteenth century (de Man 1983:202–5).

The narrative of *The Romance of the Rose* appears in the form of a dream. This raises questions about the relation of the allegorical figures who are also dream-figures to the truth which can be perceived in waking reality. It is as if the dream gives freedom to

writers of allegory, and as if dreams have a fluidity which yields a special form of allegory. This relation of dream to allegory, also present in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (discussed in [chapter 3](#)), extends to Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), which interprets dreaming allegorically, since the images which persist through the extended action of the dream stand for other psychic agencies, which, repressed in the unconscious, can only appear in a figurative mode. The critic Hayden White, discussing utterance in language in terms of its tropes (figures of speech), supplements this intuition about the displacement, within a dream, of one figure by another by saying that 'all dreams are ironical – saying one thing but meaning another – in the way that poetic allegories are ironical' (White, 1999:107). Since allegory says one thing and means another, it seems to be on the side of hidden meanings, riddles, and enigmas. Both allegory and irony trade in concealed meanings, suggesting that there is something within language itself, which when it is used, involves forms of deception, doubleness and punning.

ALLEGORY AND MEANING

Maureen Quilligan associates allegory with wordplay and punning, beginning with the point that in personification, such as with a name like Mrs Malaprop, words are already being wrested out of their normal grammatical uses (Quilligan, 1979:33–51). Allegory becomes a form of self-conscious play within language generally, which Quilligan aligns with the verbal reflexivity of comedy (Quilligan: 282–84). This view of allegory as play may explain some of the hostility directed against it as being non-serious, merely fictitious. For example, Plato (427–348 BCE) expresses hostility to allegory through Socrates, in the *Republic* (c.380 BCE). Socrates talks specifically about the education that children should have; he does not want them to have to listen to stories about the gods, saying that ‘Children cannot distinguish between what is allegory [*hyponoia*: “undersense”, “undermeaning”] and what isn’t’ (Plato 378D, 1955:116). This comment implies a split between literature and philosophy. Socrates, in Plato’s writing, fears that literature, because it carries double senses, at the level of meaning and at the level of the language in which those meanings are contained, may be destabilizing, offering dangerous meanings inadmissible to adult common sense which expects language to convey a single truth. Socrates rejects the claims of ‘literature’ in favour of the ‘truth’ of philosophy and initiates a still continuing hostility between philosophy and literature. His fear is that poetry deploys language in such a way that it invites a variety of interpretations; and his dislike of *hyponoia* signals that literature may encourage a proliferation of meanings that could be regarded as a danger to the political stability of the ideal republic: hence Socrates’ hostility towards both allegory and poetry in Plato’s *Republic*.

Yet allegory is often associated with thoroughly ‘serious’ or ‘moral’ or nationalistic images. The figure of Justice above the Old Bailey in London, blindfolded and with scales and a sword, is an allegorical representation of the processes of the law as impartial, scrupulously weighing evidence, and possessed of the power to punish. The Statue of Liberty’s uplifted torch shows that America is a beacon to other nations, providing the light of freedom. Cupid stands in London’s Piccadilly Circus, at the end of Shaftesbury Avenue, as the God of love, though the sculptor, Albert Gilbert, intended him for serious purpose, to symbolize Christian charity, as a memorial to the Victorian Lord Shaftesbury (Gombrich, 1972:1–5). Since to personify requires making a genderchoice, the feminine nature of Justice or Liberty supplements the ideological effect that these statues have, for no detail about an allegorical figure has been chosen innocently or accidentally. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1892), the first president of the Royal Academy, painted the actress Sarah Siddons (1755–1831) as *The Tragic Muse* (1784) (Penny, 1986:324–26). This depiction of the Muse has a history behind it, for stage acting often represents ‘the passions’: hence Hamlet speaks of bad actors who ‘tear a passion to tatters’ (3.2.10), while Thisbe’s suicide over the body of Pyramus in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is called a ‘passion’ (5.1.303). In Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861), Mr Wopsle, wanting to become an actor, gives public readings of William Collins (1721–59)’s ‘Ode on the Passions’ (1746). Pip, the narrator, says

I particularly venerated Mr Wopsle as Revenge, throwing his bloodstained sword in thunder down, and taking the War-denouncing trumpet with a withering look.

(Dickens, 1965:74)

The Penguin editor, Angus Calder, quotes the passage from Collins, where the 'Passions' contest each other:

Revenge impatient rose,
He threw his blood-stain'd Sword in Thunder down,
And with a with'ring Look,
The War-denouncing Trumpet took,
Were ne'er Prophetic Sounds so full of Woe ...
(Dickens, 1965:501)

Capitalization of the names associates the passions with allegory. Mr Wopsle's acting personifies the passions, as does Mrs Siddons's. If such passions as Anger, Envy and Revenge are considered, it seems that all passions or emotional states are to be thought of as personifications, and therefore as allegorical. The capitalization serves to personify an emotion, and it is the process of expansion here that gives their personification its allegorical significance. Revenge has been gendered as masculine and war-like through personification.

Reynolds paints Mrs Siddons seated on a classical throne resting upon clouds, in the manner of a deity. The picture is recognizably baroque in its ornate depiction of a divine force. Indeed, the baroque, as an artistic, architectural and literary movement associated with seventeenth-century Europe, is distinguished by its frequent use of allegory. Baroque churches in Italy and Spain displayed painted heavens on their ceilings showing kings being raised up in apotheosis, attended by goddesses, or Fame, or the Spirit of Empire. The baroque ceiling plays on the difference between the natural and the spiritual world, trying, through a trick of architecture and perspective (i.e. through *trompe l'oeil*: 'deceive the eye'), to pretend that the roof does not exist. This enables the spectator to progress, to rise up in vision from the solid, quotidian world of architecture to the reality of the heavens as they exist to the spiritual eye (Harbison, 2000:24). One historian of the baroque writes that 'of all the uses of allegory, the most spectacular was the glorification of the earthly ruler' (Martin, 1971:140).

Mrs Siddons's pose follows the design of Michelangelo's Isaiah in the Sistine Chapel. A figure behind her, on the right of the picture, holds a cup; he is modelled on the allegorical representation of Fear, as shown in the 1734 translation by John Williams of the treatise on the passions written by the painter Charles Le Brun (1619–90). Another figure, to the left, holding a dagger, is modelled on a similarly placed companion of Jeremiah in the Sistine Chapel. The cup and the dagger were traditional components that accompanied Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy, and were so used in Renaissance emblem books (these are discussed in [chapter 3](#)). These flanking figures stand for Pity and Terror, the two passions that according to Aristotle were inspired by tragedy. The tragic muse – Mrs Siddons – arouses tragic passions as much as she acts them out. The atmosphere of awe is emphasized by the Rembrandt-inspired darkness in the picture.

The allegorical representation of Mrs Siddons points to a seriousness associated with tragedy as a dramatic and literary form, but in *Hard Times* (1854) Dickens, witty about allegory as he was in *Great Expectations*, draws upon its baroque associations in creating his own allegorical image. The plot involves Mrs Sparsit's jealousy of Louisa, who has been married off to Mr Bounderby, whom she herself was engineering to

marry. Louisa's marriage is obviously loveless, and Mrs Sparsit gives way to her imagination, hoping that she will commit adultery with the upper-class James Harthouse:

Mrs Sparsit was not a poetical woman; but she took an idea, in the nature of an allegorical fancy, into her head. Much watching of Louisa, and much consequent observation of her impenetrable demeanour, which keenly whetted and sharpened Mrs Sparsit's edge, must have given her as it were a lift, in the way of inspiration. She erected in her mind a mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom; and down those stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she saw Louisa coming.

(Dickens, 1969:226–27)

This picture which Mrs Sparsit's prurience summons up, of a staircase going down towards the netherworld of Victorian sinful sexuality, so turning Louisa into a social outcast, inverts the baroque idea of going up to Heaven in an apotheosis. But the architecture of the staircase is equally baroque. Dickens not only makes fun of Mrs Sparsit, who wants Louisa to go down the staircase, but implies, by referring to the 'allegorical fancy', that he may be writing allegory himself, while critiquing the 'serious' and 'educative' pretensions that allegory normally possesses. Dickens the allegorist will be discussed in [chapter 4](#). Playful about the passions as Collins or Reynolds conceptualized them, he makes Mrs Sparsit a representative of passions herself: Envy, Malice and Sexual Frustration.

ALLEGORY AND ABSTRACTION

‘Serious’ uses of allegory come about because allegory makes abstract ideas appear real, forceful. An example of this appears in the personification drawn on by Macbeth in a speech remembering what happened when he murdered the sleeping king, Duncan:

Methought I heard a voice cry ‘Sleep no more;
Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast ...’

(2.2.34–39)

Macbeth’s speech, and the ‘voice’ which is part of his conscience, and which he hallucinates, shows his appalled realization that in killing Duncan while he was sleeping he has effectively murdered ‘sleep’ itself. Duncan himself, whether alive or dead, has become an allegory of Sleep. The speech first uses sleep as a verb, but its next three uses, as a noun, transform the abstract quality ‘sleep’ into a person. Nouns, we know, are *proper*, naming one person, or *common*, where, subdivided into *concrete* and *abstract*, they refer either to what is tangible or to qualities not accessed through the senses. If sleep is ‘innocent’, the adjective says something more about it. If it knits up a ravelled sleeve it is an active subject, an agency; this goes further than saying it is innocent. If it knits up ‘the ravelled sleeve of care’, that includes another allegorization: an allegorical figure of Sleep repairs the entangled ‘sleave’ (silk) of another allegorical figure, that of Care. This personification is always, in Renaissance emblematic pictures (see [chapter 3](#)), shown leaning on his elbow, so creating a hole in the sleeve. If sleep is ‘the death of each day’s life’, death in the abstract becomes concrete in the form of the temporal movement from day to night. It also becomes a regenerative ‘bath’ that refreshes and cleanses. Macbeth’s regicide cuts him off from sleep’s beneficent qualities, condemning him to a living death.

Shakespeare’s text at this point is allegorical, in the service of wholly intense, serious language. But abstractions can be played with, as in Lewis Carroll (1832–98)’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which parodies Shakespeare while bringing out some of the duplicities involved in language which relies on abstraction. It records a dream, in which Alice’s attempts to get into the garden may be compared with the plot of *The Romance of the Rose*. In [chapter 6](#), ‘A Mad Tea-Party’, Alice says that the March Hare ‘might do something better with the time than waste it in asking riddles that have no answer’.

‘If you knew Time as well as I do,’ said the Hatter, ‘you wouldn’t talk about wasting it. It’s *him*.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said Alice.

‘Of course you don’t!’ the Hatter said. ‘I dare say you never even spoke to Time.’

‘Perhaps not,’ Alice cautiously replied, ‘but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.’

The Hatter says that ‘Time won’t stand beating’ and tells how he was singing at a concert given by the Queen of Hearts:

‘Well, I’d hardly finished the first verse,’ said the Hatter, ‘when the Queen bawled out “He’s murdering the time! Off with his head!”’

‘How dreadfully savage!’ exclaimed Alice.

‘And ever since that,’ the Hatter went on in a mournful voice, ‘he won’t do a thing I ask! It’s always six o’clock now.’