

Mr. Widelitz. English Assignment Week 3. Monday, May 11, 2020

A) Read THE LAST CLASS by Alphonse Daudet

B) Literary Critique

Answer the following questions

- 1) After reading the final line in the story, return to the first phrase. In retrospect, how does it reinforce the unity of the story? What does the boy's lateness symbolize?
- 2) How does the author build suspense?
- 3) By his own admission, the narrator is a somewhat indifferent student. Why is he attentive and decorous during the last class?
- 4) Why do we hear about the Prussians, but never meet one in the story?
- 5) Why does the teacher advise his listeners to remember the French language? Why is this injunction so important?
- 6) Why does Franz pity his teacher?
- 7) Why does Monsieur Hamel feel that everyone in Alsace is worthy of reproach?
- 8) Is M. Hamel satisfied with his own performance as a teacher?
- 9) What important educational objective is attained in M. Hamel's last lesson? How does it happen?
- 10) We know that M. Hamel is patriotic and sincere. What else can we learn about him from the final statement that he writes on the blackboard?

C) Essay Question

In 'The Last Class', the narrator is suddenly faced with a major change in his life that will force him, and everyone he knows, to live in an altered world. All of us are now living in a 'new' world created by the Corona Virus. In a three-or-four paragraph essay, describe or imagine how you and others are reacting, adapting, and learning to live in this changed environment. Alternatively, you can use other world changing events, real or imagined, as the basis of your essay.

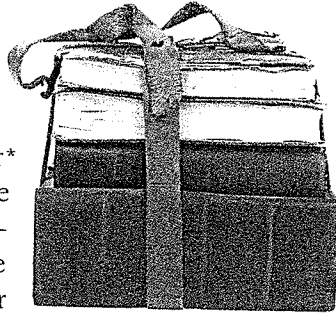
The Last Class

The Story of a Little Alsatian

Alphonse Daudet

FOCUS: CHARACTERIZATION; INFERENCE

I was very late for school that morning, and I was terribly afraid of being scolded, especially as Monsieur Hamel had told us that he should examine us on participles,* and I did not know the first thing about them. For a moment I thought of stay-



ing away from school and wandering about the fields. It was such a warm, lovely day. I could hear the blackbirds whistling on the edge of the wood, and in the Rippert field, behind the sawmill, the Prussians going through their drill.* All that was much more tempting to me than the rules concerning participles; but I had the strength to resist, and I ran as fast as I could to school.

As I passed the mayor's office, I saw that there were people gathered about the little board on which notices were posted. For two years all our bad news had come from that board — battles lost, *conscript*ions, orders from headquarters; and I thought without stopping:

"What can it be now?"

Monsieur — (French) (məs yûr') Mister (abbreviated: M.)

participles — verbal forms used as adjectives; e.g., *smiling*, as in "smiling faces."

drill — military exercises.

Why doesn't the narrator want to go to school?

How do the first two paragraphs establish the setting of the story?

Note that the Franco-Prussian War (see ABOUT THE SELECTION) took place in 1870-1871.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Then, as I ran across the square, Wachter the blacksmith, who stood there with his apprentice, reading the *placard*, called out to me:

"Don't hurry so, my boy; you'll get to your school soon enough!"

I thought that he was making fun of me, and I ran into Monsieur Hamel's little yard all out of breath.

Usually, at the beginning of school, there was a great uproar which could be heard in the street, desks opening and closing, lessons repeated aloud in *unison*, with our ears stuffed in order to learn quicker, and the teacher's stout* ruler beating on the desk:

"A little more quiet!"

I counted on all this noise to reach my bench unnoticed; but as it happened, that day everything was quiet, like a Sunday morning. Through the open window I saw my comrades already in their places, and Monsieur Hamel walking back and forth with the terrible iron ruler under his arm. I had to open the door and enter, in the midst of that perfect silence. You can imagine whether I blushed and whether I was afraid!

But no! Monsieur Hamel looked at me with no sign of anger and said very gently:

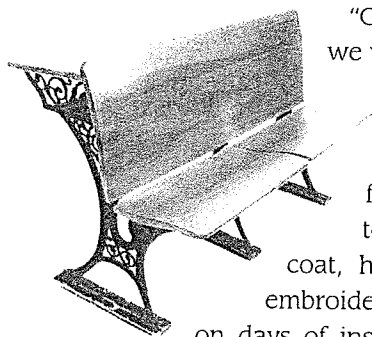
"Go at once to your seat, my little Frantz; we were going to begin without you."

I stepped over the bench and sat down at once at my desk. Not until then, when I had partly recovered from my fright, did I notice that our teacher had on his handsome blue coat, his plaited ruff,* and the black silk embroidered breeches, which he wore only on days of inspection or of distribution of prizes.

Moreover, there was something extraordinary, something solemn about the whole class. But what surprised me most was to see at the back of the room, on the benches which were usually empty, some people from the village sitting, as silent as we were: old Hauser with his three-cornered hat, the ex-mayor, the ex-postman, and others besides. They all seemed depressed; and Hauser had brought an old spelling-

Why do the students "stuff" their ears?

What environment does the narrator expect to find when he arrives at school?



HELPFUL
DEFINITIONS

stout — here, sturdy; strong.

plaited ruff — a plaited collar.

book with gnawed edges, which he held wide-open on his knee, with his great spectacles *askew*.

While I was wondering at all this, Monsieur Hamel had mounted his platform, and in the same gentle and serious voice with which he had welcomed me, he said to us:

"My children, this is the last time that I shall teach you. Orders have come from Berlin to teach nothing but German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new teacher arrives to-morrow. This is the last class in French, so I beg you to be very attentive."

Those few words overwhelmed me. Ah! the villains! that was what they had posted at the mayor's office.

My last class in French!

And I barely knew how to write! So I should never learn! I must stop short where I was! How angry I was with myself because of the time I had wasted, the lessons I had missed, running about after nests, or sliding on the Saar!* My books, which only a moment before I thought so tiresome, so heavy to carry — my grammar, my sacred history — seemed to me now like old friends, from whom I should be terribly grieved to part. And it was the same about Monsieur Hamel. The thought that he was going away, that I should never see him again, made me forget the punishments, the blows with the ruler.

Poor man! It was in honour of that last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes; and I understood now why those old fellows from the village were sitting at the end of the room. It seemed to mean that they regretted not having come oftener to the school. It was also a way of thanking our teacher for his forty years of faithful service, and of paying their respects to the fatherland which was vanishing.

I was at that point in my reflections, when I heard my name called. It was my turn to recite. What would I not have given to be able to say from beginning to end that famous rule about participles, in a loud, distinct voice, without a slip! But I got mixed up at the first words, and I stood there swaying against my bench, with a full heart, afraid to raise my head. I heard Monsieur Hamel speaking to me:

"I will not scold you, my little Frantz; you must be punished enough; that is the way it goes; every day we say to ourselves: 'Pshaw! I have time enough. I will learn to-mor-

Saar — a river that flows through France and Germany.

*Why does
"Berlin" order
that only German
be taught?*

*How is it
possible to slide
on the Saar?*

*Why must
M. Hamel
leave?*

*Which
fatherland is
vanishing?*

*H*ELPFUL
DEFINITIONS

Who are
"those people"?

row.' And then you see what happens. Ah! it has been the great misfortune of our Alsace always to postpone its lessons until to-morrow. Now those people are entitled to say to us: 'What! you claim to be French, and you can neither speak nor write your language!' In all this, my poor Frantz, you are not the guiltiest one. We all have our fair share of reproaches to address to ourselves.

Who is at fault?
Why?

"Your parents have not been careful enough to see that you were educated. They preferred to send you to work in the fields or in the factories, in order to have a few more sous.* And have I nothing to reproach myself for? Have I not often made you water my garden instead of studying? And when I wanted to go fishing for trout, have I ever hesitated to dismiss you?"

Why is
one's native
language described
as "the key to a
prison"?

Then, passing from one thing to another, Monsieur Hamel began to talk to us about the French language, saying that it was the most beautiful language in the world, the most clear, the most substantial; that we must always retain it among ourselves, and never forget it, because when a people falls into *servitude*, "so long as it clings to its language, it is as if it held the key to its prison." Then he took the grammar and read us our lesson. I was amazed to see how readily I understood. Everything that he said seemed so easy to me, so easy. I believed, too, that I had never listened so closely, and that he, for his part, had never been so patient with his explanations. One would have said that, before going away, the poor man desired to give us all his knowledge, to force it all into our heads at a single blow.

Why does
little Frantz
understand
so readily?

When the lesson was at an end, we passed to writing. For that day Monsieur Hamel had prepared some entirely new examples,* on which was written in a fine, round hand*: "France, Alsace, France, Alsace." They were like little flags, waving all about the class, hanging from the rods of our desks. You should have seen how hard we all worked and how silent it was! Nothing could be heard save the grinding of the pens over the paper. At one time some cock-chafers* flew in; but no one paid any attention to

What does Daudet
mean when he says
"They were like little
flags ... our desks"?

*H*ELPFUL DEFINITIONS

sous — French monetary units equivalent to a few cents.

examples — here, pages headed by sample words, written according to the rules of correct penmanship, that had to be copied by the students.

hand — here, handwriting.

cock-chafers — large beetles.

them, not even the little fellows who were struggling with their straight lines, with a will and *conscientious* application, as if even the lines were French. On the roof of the schoolhouse, pigeons cooed in low tones, and I said to myself as I listened to them:

"I wonder if they are going to compel them to sing in German too!"

From time to time, when I raised my eyes from my paper. I saw Monsieur Hamel sitting motionless in his chair and staring at the objects about him as if he wished to carry away in his glance the whole of his little schoolhouse. Think of it! For forty years he had been there in the same place, with his yard in front of him and his class just as it was! But the benches and desks were polished and rubbed by use; the walnuts in the yard had grown, and the hop-vine* which he himself had planted now *festooned* the windows even to the roof. What a heart-rending thing it must have been for that poor man to leave all those things, and to hear his sister walking back and forth in the room overhead, packing their trunks! For they were to go away the next day — to leave the province forever.

However, he had the courage to keep the class to the end. After the writing, we had the lesson in history; then the little ones sang all together the *ba, be, bi, bo, bu*. Yonder,* at the back of the room, old Hauser had put on his spectacles, and, holding his spelling-book in both hands, he spelled out the letters with them. I could see that he too was applying himself. His voice shook with emotion, and it was so funny to hear him, that we all longed to laugh and to cry. Ah! I shall remember that last class.

Suddenly the church clock struck twelve, then the Angelus* rang. At the same moment, the bugles of the Prussians returning from drill *blared* under our windows. Monsieur Hamel rose, pale as death, from his chair. Never had he seemed to me so tall.

"My friends," he said, "my friends, I — I —"

hop-vine — a twining plant, parts of which can be used in brewing beer, medications, etc.

yonder — over there; at a distance.

Angelus — church bell that rings three times a day: morning, noon, and evening.

Who is having difficulty? Why?

What are the little ones singing?

What may Hauser be feeling?

Why do the children long to simultaneously laugh and cry?

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

*What is causing
M. Hamel to feel
"suffocated"?*

But something suffocated him. He could not finish the sentence.

Thereupon he turned to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and, bearing on [it] with all his might, he wrote in the largest letters he could:

"VIVE LA FRANCE!"



*What is
strange about the
last line of the story?
Explain its
significance.*

Then he stood there, with his head resting against the wall, and without speaking, he motioned to us with his hand:

"That is all; go."



ENGLISH LITERATURE WEEK THREE Mr. WIDELITZ

Literary Critique

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RETURN INFORMATION:

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