



Celia Lighton Thaxter Two Poems—Land-locked, The Sandpiper

Objectives:

1. To appreciate the literary techniques used in two poems by Celia Thaxter.
2. To appreciate the sentiments Thaxter expresses in these two poems.
3. To determine the literary techniques used in Thaxter's poems and put them to use in your own poem.
4. To connect Thaxter's love for the sea with her friend Childe Hassam's paintings.

Process:

1. Read Celia Thaxter's poems, "Land-locked" and "The Sandpiper."
2. Answer the questions about each poem.
3. Locate a Childe Hassam painting set on the Isles of Shoals and use it as inspiration for writing your own poem about the sea. Incorporate as many of Celia Thaxter's poetic techniques in your poem as you can.
4. Illustrate your poem either with a painting/drawing of your own, or some other form of media.





Celia Loughton Thaxter "Land-locked"

Context:

When Celia Thaxter got married, she left her island home and her family for life in a suburb of Boston. She was unprepared for the loss she felt for her family and the sea. Pregnant with her third child, Celia wrote to her mother, asking her to come be with her. Her mother replied:

"I am very worried about you and your coming confinement. You will be careful, won't you, dear. Do not reach up or start sudden or do any heavy work. . . . By what you say of your



feeling, it should be a little girl. I long to talk it all over. Try to come to the island and bring the children. Father is quite lame and I don't feel I ought to leave him for any length of time, but I shall try to come in the fall when I can stay two weeks. Father invites you all to come here. You must for my sake. Come early. I long to see the children. . . . Kiss the boys, your devoted mother, Eliza Loughton"

from a letter in the Spring of 1858. Rosamond Thaxter, *Sandpiper: The Life and Letters of Celia Thaxter* (Hampton, N.H.: Peter Randall, 1963) 57.

Both mother and daughter were lonely for each other, unable to be with each other at a time when both clearly needed each other. Celia dealt with the separation by writing. "Land-locked" is an expression of that loneliness she felt not only for her island home but for her mother. She cries out through her sadness and homesickness and begs for the river to lead her back to the sea, which symbolizes both her mother and her home:



Land-locked

Black lie the hills; swiftly doth daylight flee;
 And, catching gleams of sunset's dying smile,
 Through the dusk land for many a changing mile
 The river runneth softly to the sea.

O happy river, could I follow thee!
 O yearning heart, that never can be still!
 O wistful eyes, that watch the steadfast hill,
 Longing for level line of solemn sea!



Have patience; here are flowers and songs
 of birds,
 Beauty and fragrance, wealth of sound and
 sight,
 All summer's glory thine from morn till
 night,
 And life too full of joy for uttered words.

Neither am I ungrateful; but I dream
 Deliciously how twilight falls to-night
 Over the glimmering water, how the light
 Dies blissfully away, until I seem

To feel the wind, sea-scented, on my cheek,
 To catch the sound of dusky flapping sail
 And dip of oars, and voices on the gale
 Afar off, calling low, -- my name they speak!

O Earth! Thy summer song of joy may soar
 Ringing to heaven in triumph. I but crave
 The sad, caressing murmur of the wave
 That breaks in tender music on the shore.



Literary Terms:

1. Personification
2. Apostrophe
3. Iambic pentameter
4. Rhyme scheme
5. Alliteration
6. Assonance
7. Tone
8. Theme
9. Symbol

Discussion:

1. Note the **personification** and **apostrophe** that Thaxter uses in this poem. List examples. Evaluate the effectiveness of each instance.
2. Discuss the effectiveness of the use of **iambic pentameter** as the rhythm pattern for this poem. How does this rhythm pattern mimic the rocking action of the sea?
3. What is the **rhyme scheme** of the poem? How does this rhyming pattern enhance the meaning of the poem?





4. Find several examples of **alliteration** and **assonance** in this poem. What does this literary technique add to the feeling of the poem?
5. What is the overall tone of the poem? How does the tone make you feel? What do you think Millay wants you to take away from this poem?
6. Have you ever missed something or someone the way Celia Thaxter misses the sea and her mother? If so, what? How did you deal with it? What did you do about it?



Celia Loughton Thaxter The Sandpiper

Context

Still taught in some schoolrooms, this poem reflects not only Thaxter's love of nature, especially the sea and its creatures, it also reflects the transcendental philosophy that was prevalent in New England at the time. Thaxter would have been aware of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and other Transcendentalists and clearly realizes that connecting with nature is also another way to connect with God:

The Sandpiper

Across the lonely beach we flit,
One little sandpiper and I,
And fast I gather, but by bit,
The scattered drift-wood, bleached and dry.
The wild waves reach their hands for it,
The wild wind raves, the tide runs high,
As up and down the beach we flit,
One little sandpiper and I.

Above our heads the sullen clouds
Scud, black and swift, across the sky:
Like silent ghosts in misty shrouds
Stand out the white light-houses high.
Almost as far as eye can reach
I see the close-reefed vessels fly,
As fast we flit along the beach,
One little sandpiper and I.

I watch him as he skims along,
Uttering his sweet and mournful cry;
He starts not at my fitful song,
Nor flash of fluttering drapery.
He has no thought of any wrong,
He scans me with a fearless eye:
Stanch friends are we, well tried and strong,
The little sandpiper and I.





Comrade, where wilt thou be to-night,
When the loosed storm breaks furiously?
My drift-wood fire will burn so bright!
To what warm shelter canst thou fly?
I do not fear for thee, though wroth
The tempest rushes through the sky;
For are we not God's children both,
Thou, little sandpiper, and I?

Discussion:

1. What is the **theme** of this poem? What is Thaxter telling us here? Do you agree or disagree?
2. What **symbolizes** your relationship with God in your life the way the sandpiper does for Thaxter?

Creative Response

1. Research on the internet **Childe Hassam**, Celia Thaxter's artist friend who spent many weeks on the Isles of Shoals painting what he saw and felt.
2. Choose one of his Isles of Shoals paintings to draw inspiration from, and write a poem based on what you see in his painting.
3. Illustrate your poem with an artistic effort of your own, using pastels, water colors, or oils.
4. Share your creation with your classmates.

