

1.1 Pre-task: How well can we analyze without tools?

Before we actually start explaining the tool, I'd like to make a little experiment with you: You may have seen the movie we will work with here (*The Man in the Iron Mask*): it's about Alexandre Dumas's famous musketeers D'Artagnan (David Byrne), Athos (John Malkovich), Aramis (Jeremy Irons) and Porthos (Gerard Depardieu). In this movie, the musketeers are already a bit long in the tooth. The task concerns the beginning of the movie. You will read the first encounter of the musketeers after a long time.



Aramis



Porthos



D'Artagnan



Athos



Task:
Read the text below and characterize each musketeer

Aramis is praying in a room. Porthos enters, dismisses the prostitutes accompanying him:

Porthos: Stop praying and revel with me, Aramis! I need my spirits lifted. I'm old, I'm weak, my strength is gone.

Aramis: Porthos! I'm praying [...].

Porthos: Are you blind too? I know you're blind, because if you'd seen those tits, you'd have tears in your eyes.

Aramis: There's more to life than a good pair of tits.

Porthos: Really? If you can name me one thing, one only thing, that is more sublime than the feel of a plump pink nipple between my lips, I'll build you a new cathedral.

Aramis: Forgiveness.

Porthos: Forgiveness. [*farts deliberately*] Oh, I'm so sorry, forgive me. Forgive me [*starts hitting Aramis*] Am I forgiven? Am I forgiven? [*Aramis smacks him*] I can see that your forgiveness isn't sweeter than a plump nipple.

Aramis [desperate]: Don't you understand? I'm trying to pray.

Porthos [violently]: You're always praying. [*They start fighting*]

D'Artagnan enters the room; they stop fighting, happy that he has come:

Porthos: D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan! How are you, young pup?

Aramis: You interrupted a theological discussion.

D'Artagnan: So I see.

Aramis: Sit down.

D'Artagnan: No, I come upon the king's business. He wishes to see you.

Aramis: Still you serve him loyally, even though people throw rotten eggs at his emblem.

Porthos: D'Artagnan, look at you! You look so young and I feel so old.

D'Artagnan: The king says immediately.

[Exits]

Later, D'Artagnan visits Athos. Athos is alone at home playing the violin.

Athos [surprised and happy]: D'Artagnan!

D'Artagnan: You have improved.

Athos: It's been so long!

D'Artagnan: So it has, my friend.

Athos: What's the occasion?

D'Artagnan: As you say, it's been too long.

[...] I'm sorry I haven't been to see you lately.

Athos: Head of the King's bodyguards? Must keep you busy. Especially with this king.

D'Artagnan: Still, I should have come more often.

Athos: I belong to the past, when grown men wore the uniform.

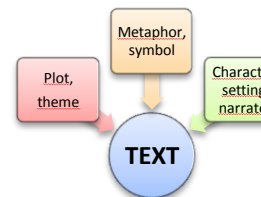
D'Artagnan: At least it gives you the time to practice your violin.

Athos: And feel sorry for myself.

Want to know more?

Why I am doing all this

My students are 1st and 2nd-year undergraduate students. When I give them a story to read, or a movie to watch, they can do the following:



As you can see, most of them are able to

1. provide the plot and say what the text is about (theme)

2. locate metaphors and symbols

3. spot main character traits and identify setting and narrators.

However, when I ask them what all this means, they are usually silent. So I try to offer them the best possible tool with which to analyze the meaning of a large number of stories. This does not substitute the other abilities they already have, but it provides a much-needed complement.

