

# MONIE DUONG'S EMULATION HANDBOOK



by Marie-Helene Bertino

2 a.m. at the Cat's Pajamas is a novel about the adventures of three souls who live in Philadelphia on Christmas Eve. Madeline is a feisty nine-year-old girl who aspires to become a jazz singer. She struggles with balancing her life as she mourns for the death of her mother and deals with rejection at school. She goes on a mission to find the famous jazz club called The Cat's Pajamas in hopes to make her first stage appearance. On the other hand, Sarina Green, who happens to be Madeline's fifth grade teacher, struggles with searching for her new love in the city after a divorce. And on the opposite side of town, Lorca, the owner of The Cat's Pajamas, finds out that he may lose his club unless he can find \$30,000 to save it. Together, they discover new things about hope, love, and music in the city of Philadelphia.

# Element #1: Chapter Organization

## What is this element?

The author uses the chapter organization strategy to create a division in each life but to also add suspense to what is going to happen at the end. Every chapter, the author switches between the lives of Madeleine, Sarina, and Lorca. The title of the chapters is the time that the event is happening.

## Why does it matter?

The different lives of Madeleine, Sarina, and Lorca all happened in the city of Philadelphia so the chapter organization makes the book more complicated in a way for us to piece together all of the events that happened on this one day.

The chapters are relatively short which emphasizes that these are just glimpse of what happened at the certain time on this particular person's day.

## What the impact on the reader?

At first, the beginning of the book would be confusing because the day had just started starting with Madeline's life. The next chapter was a new character and after that chapter was another new character but after awhile, you'll understand the pattern of whose life is whose. This makes you become more engage to find out what will happen with one person even though the next chapter will be someone different. I believe Marie-Helene Bertino wanted the book to be like a puzzle for us to piece together the lives of each character and show what could happen in different areas of Philadelphia on the same day.

## Chapter Titles:

7:00 a.m.

7:15 a.m.

7:30 a.m.

8:00 a.m.

9:00 a.m.

10:00 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

11:00 a.m.

11:30 a.m.

12:30 p.m.

1:00 p.m.

# Element #2: Point of View

When Lorca enters, Gus looks up, eyes still narrowed in focus. "Can we talk?"

Lorca detects a note of gravity unusual for the easygoing drummer.

"He guessed," Sonny says.

Gus replaces the cap to the bottle of paint and wheels his chair up to Lorca's desk. "I can help," he says. "I have money."

"You have thirty thousand dollars?" Lorca says.

"Jesus." Gus pushes himself away from the desk. "I don't have that much."

Sonny marks the page in his book. "I told you it was a ridiculous amount."

"I thought you meant, like, a couple hundred." Gus brushes excess filings from the plane's body, the remnants from sanding a wing or a door.

"A couple hundred could not be classified as 'ridiculous.'"

"Depends on who you ask," Gus says. (61)

Lorca leaves them to debate. He hoists two trash bags from the line and carries them outside. (62)

## What is this element?

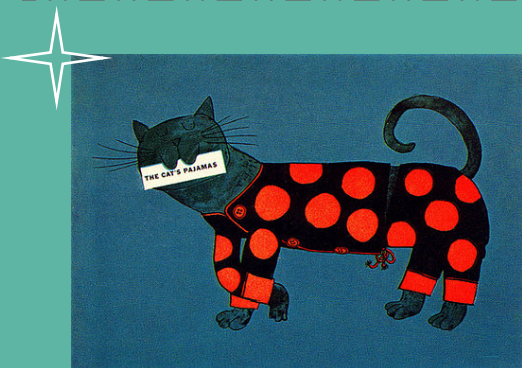
The author uses third person omniscient point of view for this section of the chapter. The scene is being described purely based on the characters' actions, the dialogue, and the setting. It's not just focused on one person's perspective.

## Why does it matter?

The point of view can reveal a lot about the character(s) in a book. In this case, it is important because the book is telling the story of three main characters. Each character's life is surrounded by different people and the point of view can describe the scene more clearly and uniquely from an omniscient view. It also shows how the characters interact with one another which reveals the relationships between them without actually having to explain it.

## What the impact on the reader?

I believe this element allows the reader to know an overall understanding of what happened within that time frame of the character's life. The omniscient point of view makes the reader see the scene more clearly because we'd know everything that is happening. Also, the chapters are relatively short so seeing from a limited view could not be enough information to understand everything because there are other things happening besides that one character.



# Element #3: Dialogue and Narration

## What is this element?

The author often switches between dialogue and narration to describe the scene. The sentences are usually short to medium length which allows the transition between the description and dialogue to be smooth and simple. The sentences are short because everything is told how it is and not exaggerated. Each sentence describes something whether it's an action, sound, thought, or scene.



The women look in different directions. No radio plays. The street hovers between night and dawn. This is the second time they've run into each other in the neighborhood, both times marked by stammering and adamant friendliness.

"Key line," says Georgie.

"Wonderful."

"You should come!" Georgie's volume frightens both of them. "It's the old gang."

Sarina has never been part of a gang. "Tonight?" she says, then remembers Georgie has already said tonight. A forgotten flurry announces itself on the top of her head. It burns wet. "I can't tonight."

"You must." Georgie's time is panicked. "They would love to see you. Michael, Ben..."

Mrs. Santiago returns with the pie.

"You don't want this bag of potatoes hanging around," Sarina says.

The room's silence doubles down. (10) Sarina has no idea why, in the presence of this ex-punk queen from high school, she is compelled to insult herself. Bundling the pie, Mrs. Santiago tsks.

"You're not a bag of potatoes," Georgie says. (11)

## Why does it matter?

This is important because each chapter is relatively short and the writing style overall is very straight forward so the short sentences switching between dialogue and narration provides all the information without overdoing it. Also, the book chapters is divided by time so the author has to describe everything and anything that was important or relevant that happened within that time frame.

## What the impact on the reader?

This element allows the reader to imagine the scene and interactions clearly because the description is provided along with dialogue which is supported by the narration so it's hard for the reader to be lost. Also, the reader could not feel overwhelmed by over describing details because the sentences are short and very straight to the point.

# My Emulation: Valentine's Day

8:00 a.m. on Valentine's day...

Charles yields at a red light. To his right is a vendor full of teddy bears, roses, and chocolate. The salesman is exchanging the pink gift bag with the man paying \$20. The man gives the bag to the short lady who jumps and smothers him in kisses. "I hate Valentine's Day," Charles says.

The New York streets are flooded with people and traffic. His eyes wander to his left and he sees this red headed beauty. She was wearing shiny black shoes and a long red coat. He contently watches her cross the light. "She's beautiful," he says.

The car behind him honks to signal him to go. He steps on the pedal and takes a right towards the girl. He admires the reflection of her as she disappears from his mirror.

8:45 a.m.

"Sorry I'm late. I walked here and the sidewalks are hectic in the morning," Mani says.

"Get to your cube, I put a bunch of new cases on your desk to look over. I want it done before today ends," Lucas says.

"Yes Mr. Lucas."

She skips to her chair and drops her bag. Her red coat was the brightest thing in the gray building. The lady next to her smirks and scoots her chair over. Mani's phone rings which breaks the silence in the room. Everyone turns their head to the echoing ring. "Sorry everyone!" Mani says. Her phone's screen says that she got a message from Damien. She rolls her eyes and silences it. Then she opens the first folder and starts reading.

9:15 a.m.

Damien steps out the steamy shower. He grabs the towel of the rack and wraps it around his waist. He smiles in the mirror as he runs his fingers through his hair. Then he skips over to his bed to pick up his phone. He frowns. "No text from my fiancé Mani," he says.

He throws on his jeans and hoodie and walks to his car. He tries to turn it on but it won't start. "Damn, empty tank. Guess I'm walking to my princess," he says. He grabs the \$5 out the compartment and locks his car.

Annotation 1: Chapter Organization

For element #1, the author used chapter organization to create a division in each life but to also add suspense to what is going to happen at the end. For my story, I decided to make my chapter titles different times of the day as well. The significance of the titles is to signal that it's a new person's perspective and to also show how their lives connect. I hope that the reader can sense that within my short story, the lives of the three characters all have an impact on each other. I also hope that the reader becomes curious of what is going to happen next.



# My Emulation: Valentine's Day

## Annotation 2: Point of View

For element #2, the author uses third person omniscient point of view to describe the lives of the different characters. For my story, I only told it in the perspective of third person so I used the names of the characters Charles, Damien, and Mani. I also used pronouns like he and she. I wanted to describe the scenes from the characters' perspectives but also from their surroundings. I didn't want to tell the story from their eyes but instead have someone on the outside describing everything that is happening. I was hoping that the reader can imagine the scenes more clearly with a bigger picture instead of just one person's point of view. I also hope that the reader can put the pieces of each story together to see how the characters' lives connect.

## Annotation 3: Dialogue and Narration

For element #3, the author switches between dialogue and narration to describe the scenes. For my story, I tried to do that as well. I used narration to describe the scenery and surroundings of the characters and I used the dialogue to compliment the narration. I also tried to keep the sentences short because that's what the author did. The purpose of the short sentences is so that the reader can comprehend the words more in the head rather than reading a long sentence. I also decided to make the sentences short because the chapters are short glimpse of the character's life so I wanted to get straight to the point with the details. Also, I mixed the dialogue and narration because I wanted them to compliment each other so the reader can imagine the scene in his or her mind. Mixing them also helps me not be over descriptive nor not descriptive enough so the reader won't be lost.



# About the Authors



Marie-Helene Bertino is an author, editor, and writing instructor at One Story. She wrote a story collection called *Safe as Houses* which won the Iowa Short Fiction Prize. She also won The O. Henry Prize, Outstanding Collection by The Story Prize, The Pushcart Prize, and The Mississippi Review Prize. She was a biographer for patients who have Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). She sang in a band named after a Jimmy Stewart movie in Philadelphia. She admires film directors and deeply loves musicians such as her mom. Even though she is a Philadelphia native, she is currently living in Brooklyn.



I am Monie Duong, a tenth grader attending Science Leadership Academy in Center City, Philadelphia, PA. I'm 16 years old and 5'3. I like to read and watch anything that is a romantic comedy. I also like writing love stories and filming short comedy videos for school. Sometimes I would enjoy a mystery if it's unpredictable. I aspire to become an anesthesiologist. My favorite color is green but I prefer to wear pink and black clothing. My favorite type of food to eat is breakfast and my favorite person in the whole entire world is my god sister, Krystal.