

A dramatic seascape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, with a bright orange and yellow glow from the sun just below the horizon. The ocean is dark blue, with white foam from breaking waves visible. In the foreground, dark, jagged rocks are scattered along the shoreline, partially submerged in the water. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

“By the Waters of Babylon”

by Stephen Vincent Benet

What lessons have you learned from a journey you have taken?



By the Waters of Babylon

Background

The title of this story is an **allusion**, or reference, to Psalm 137 in the Bible. The psalm tells of the Israelites' sorrow over the destruction of their temple in Zion (a reference to Jerusalem) and their enslavement in Babylon. The psalm begins, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."



What was “Babylon”?

- Everyone who was not a “saved person” had to worship their dictator as a god. Anyone who did not worship him was marked to die.
- Dictator had absolute authoritative & religious power.
- Eventually, political, religious, & economic centers moved away from Babylon. Beautiful bricks were carried off to be used in construction projects in what is now Baghdad. However, this was such a huge city that the majority of the buildings and walls remained to be covered up with the sands of the Euphrates River and the blowing sands of the Middle East.



An entrance to Babylon
(on display at a museum
in Europe).

Babylon now...



...an Apoca-what!?

- An **apocalypse** is a great disaster, the end of the world, or the end of civilization.



By the Waters of Babylon

Introducing the Story

We thought, because we had power, we had wisdom.

Stephen Vincent Benét



By the Waters of Babylon

Introducing the Story

“By the Waters of Babylon” is a story told by a young narrator who seeks wisdom in the ruins of a once-great civilization. ▼

- As John, the narrator, explores the ruins, readers gradually come to understand the tragedy of the Great Burning and the significance of the Place of the Gods.

By the Waters of Babylon

Literary Focus: First-Person Point of View

First-Person Point of View: "I" Tells the Story

When stories are written in the first person, readers ▼

- share the narrator's experience and feelings ▼
- know *only* what the narrator knows about other characters and events



By the Waters of Babylon

Literary Focus: First-Person Point of View

First-Person Point of View: “I” Tells the Story

Stories written from the first-person point of view often ▼

- have a sense of intimacy, as if the narrator was a friend talking to us ▼
- use a **persona**—a “mask” or voice for the fictional narrator

Science Fiction & the Apocalypse

- Science fiction stories can deal with the **actual destruction** (apocalypse) OR the **aftermath** (post-apocalypse).
- Many sci fi stories are set in a post-apocalyptic setting & often the reader doesn't realize the setting is post-apocalyptic until the very end of the story.

By the Waters of Babylon

Literary Focus: Setting

Setting: Where and When

Setting is the time and place in which the action occurs. Setting can be used to ▼

- create a **mood**, or atmosphere ▼
- reveal character ▼
- provide the story's main conflict



Create a chart in your notes to define these terms to know.

1. Dead Places
2. The Great River
3. Old books & writings
4. Old Days
5. Place of the Gods
6. God-road
7. Ou-dis-sun
8. Bitter Water
9. "UBTREAS"
10. "ASHING"
11. The temple with the stars for a roof
12. The dead god

The Dead Places

Houses or dwellings of humans who died a long time ago.



The Great River, Ou-dis-sun

The Hudson River



Old Books and Writings:

Books written in English that existed before society was destroyed

The Old Days:

The days before The Great Burning, or “present day”

The God Roads

Concrete roads a.k.a.
streets.



The Bitter Water

The Ocean



The Place of the Gods

New York City



“UBTREAS”

The Sub Treasury in NYC, now called Federal Hall National Memorial.



“ashing”

A Statue of President George Washington at
Union Square, NYC.



The temple with the stars for a roof:

The ceiling at Grand Central Station



Fantasy and reality:

1. Priests, chants and spells
2. A purification process
3. Interpreting animals as signs
4. Cultures in the future having less knowledge than cultures in the past (let's look at an example...)

Restroom facilities in 117 A.D.



Now, let's check out
the early 1900's...

2,000 years later...



Usually, the father of the family dug a new hole a few feet from the outhouse, moved the house onto the new hole, then took the dirt and filled in the old hole.

Literary Elements

- Genre – type of literature
- Allusion – reference to another literary work
- Simile – a comparison using like or as
- Metaphor – a comparison not using like or as
- Theme – the author's message

Figurative Language and Theme

- This link explains the relationship between these two concepts.
- <http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/jlf00d-73657-figurative-language-waters-babylon-literature-education-ppt-powerpoint/>

Plot

- Pay close attention to the details of this journey
- How does the setting impact the meaning?

