

Modified Two-Chunk Paragraph
Literary Analysis
English IH
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In “Lust,” Susan Minot makes strategic use of scene length to emphasize its increasingly sorrowful tone. Over the course of the story, which forms a collage of memories, her anonymous 1st Person narrator looks back on her early sexual experiences with growing disillusionment. Minot emphasizes this gradual shift in tone by limiting the length of the the narrator’s memories, a narrative approach she consistently employs for different reasons. In the opening scene, for example, the narrator states: “Leo was from a long time ago, the first one I ever saw (. . .) In the spring before the Hellman’s filled their pool, we’d go down there in the deep end (. . .), and like that. I met him the first month away at boarding school. He had a halo from the campus light behind him. I flipped” (Minot 3). Here, Minot keeps the narrator’s description of Leo to a minimum in order to suggest her bashful innocence. Even now, the narrator clearly carries a fondness for him, as she recalls the “halo” around his head and how she “flipped” at the sight of it. Because Leo was the “first one (she) ever saw” in a state of undress, she is understandably too embarrassed to detail their encounters in the Hellman’s pool. Instead, she can only bring herself to imply what happened between them with the phrase “and like that.” Her description is so vague that the reader can almost envision her looking away and blushing as she speaks. In this instance, then, Minot’s economy of words helps the reader understand how shy and romantic the narrator was when she first began dating other boys.

As the story, continues, though, Minot's brevity serves a different purpose—namely, each scene suggests that the narrator's subsequent "relationships" turned out to be little more than a series of fleeting sexual encounters that left her feeling empty and abandoned. For instance, the narrator goes on to recount the following experience in historical present tense:

"Come here," he says on the porch.

I go over to the hammock and he takes my wrist with two fingers.

"What?"

He kisses my palm and directs my hand (. . .) (5-6).

Here, the narrator's tone is noticeably flat and detached. She no longer hints at the events that transpired with this particular boy; she states them. Unlike Leo, he remains both nameless and (aside from his "two fingers") featureless. He forgoes any kind of flirtation or courtship and simply orders her to come closer. The only thing that distinguishes him in her memory is what he wants from her: a sexual favor. In fact, his physical desire is so singular and urgent that he disappears from the porch and reappears on the hammock, and as soon as his desire is satisfied, he disappears from the page as quickly as he disappears from her life. Minot's brevity here has a heartbreaking effect on the reader instead of an endearing one. By bringing this scene (and others like it) to such an abrupt end, Minot implies that the narrator has grown increasingly jaded over time. Despite her best intentions, she ultimately found lust when what she truly sought was love.