

Mrs. Goddard Orpen. Stories About Famous Precious Stones. From Chapter 3, "La Peregrina"

The various notions relative to the origin of pearls have done credit to the fertility of man's imagination. Some writers have affirmed that they were the product of "ocean dew," whatever that may be, and were accordingly affected by atmospheric conditions. Thus they were large and muddy during the season of the monsoon, becoming clear and lustrous again in hot dry weather, while thunder and lightning had a fatal effect upon them. These ideas were prevalent in the Ceylon fisheries, which at one time were most prolific in their precious crop. Another idea was even still more quaint. According to it, the oyster was looked upon as affecting the habits of the feathered tribe. The pearl was an egg which the oyster laid after the manner of hens.

Modern science, more exact if less imaginative, has decided that the pearl is due to an accident, and an inconvenient accident which frequently befalls the parent oyster. A grain of sand, or some such minute foreign substance, gets within the jealous valves of the mollusk and causes great irritation to the soft body of the pulpy inhabitant. Accordingly it endeavors to render the presence of the intruder less irksome by coating it with exudations from its own body. In other words the grain of sand is "scratchy," so the oyster smooths it over. Why, then, after once coating the objectionable grain of sand and thus making it a comfortable lodger, the oyster should go on for years adding layer after layer of pearl-substance remains is truly a mystery. But such is its habitual practice, and to this apparently aimless perseverance we owe the existence of pearls.

Pearls vary very much in size, ranging from the seed-pearl no bigger than a mustard grain, to the Peregrina as large as a pigeon's egg; and they vary also in shape. The most prized are the round pearls which besides their extreme rarity are supposed to have an especially delicate luster; the pear-shaped pearl generally retains the greatest size.

Define Each Word

quaint: _____

affect (as in "affected a caring attitude"): _____

render: _____

irk: _____

luster: _____

Write the Correct Word from the Vocabulary

1. The baseball coach _____ the umpire by loudly criticizing every ball and strike that the umpire called; the coach was ejected from the game.
2. Maddy perceived her father’s habit of always opening the car door for her mother as nothing more than a _____ anachronism.
3. Raymond believed that including fluency in Mandarin Chinese in his resume would add some _____ to his otherwise dull credentials.
4. When confronted by the police regarding a recent home invasion robbery, the suspects _____ an attitude of innocence, ignorance, and cooperation.
5. The aggressive tackle by the linebacker _____ the wide receiver unconscious.

Comprehension and Discussion: Answer Each Question in Complete Sentences

1. According to Orpen and “modern science,” how is a pearl formed?

2. What is Orpen’s purpose in the first two paragraphs?
