



# **English**

## **G.C.E. A/L**

**Resource Book**  
**Grades 12 and 13**  
**(To be implemented from 2017)**

Department of English  
Faculty of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences  
National Institute of Education  
Maharagama  
Sri Lanka  
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**English G.C.E. A/L**

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## **Message from the Director General**

The first phase of the new competency based curriculum, with 8 years curriculum cycle was introduced to secondary education in Sri Lanka in 2007 replacing the existed content based education system with basic objective of developing the national level competencies recommended by the National Education Commission.

The second phase of the curriculum cycle to be introduced to grades 12 and 13 starts from 2017. For this purpose, National Institute of Education has introduced a rationalization process and developed rationalized syllabi for these grades using research based outcomes and various suggestions made by different stakeholders.

In the rationalization process, vertical integration has been used to systematically develop the competency levels in all subjects from fundamentals to advanced levels using the bottom up approach. Horizontal integration is used to minimize the overlapping in the subject content and to reduce the content over loading in the subjects to produce more students friendly and implementable curricular.

A new format has been introduced to the teachers' guide with the aim of providing the teachers with the required guidance in the areas of lesson planning, teaching, carrying out activities and measurement and evaluation. These guidelines will help the teachers to be more productive and effective in the classroom.

The new teachers' guides provide freedom to the teachers in selecting quality inputs and additional activities to develop the competencies of the students. The new teachers' guides are not loaded with subject content that is covered in the recommended textbooks. Therefore, it is essential for the teacher to use the new teachers' guides simultaneously with the relevant textbooks prepared by

Education Publication Department as reference guides to be more aware of the syllabi.

The basic objectives of the rationalized syllabi and the new format of teachers' guide and newly developed textbooks are to bring a shift from the teacher centered education system into a student centered and more activity based education system in order to develop the competencies and skills of the school leavers and to enable the system to produce suitable human resource to the world of work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of Academic Affairs Board and Council of National Institute of Education and all the resource persons who have immensely contributed in developing these new teacher guides.

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## **Message from Ven. Deputy Director General**

Learning expands into a wider scope. It makes life enormous and extremely simple. The human being is naturally excellent in the skill of learning. A country when human development is considered the main focus uses learning as a tool to do away with malpractices identified with intellect and to create a better world through good practices.

It is essential to create valuable things for learning and learning methods and facilities within the adhere of education. That is how the curriculum, syllabi, teachers' guides and facilitators join the learning system.

Modern Sri Lanka has possessed a self – directed education system which is a blend of global trends as well as ancient heritage.

It is necessary to maintain the consistency of the objectives of the subject at the national level. However, facilitators are free to modify or adapt learning teaching strategies creatively to achieve the learning outcomes, competency and competency level via the subject content prescribed in the Syllabus. Therefore, this Teachers' Guide has been prepared to promote the teachers' role and to support the students as well as the parents.

Furthermore, at the end of a lesson, the facilitators of the learning- teaching process along with the students should come to a verification of the achievement level on par with ones expected exam by a national level examiner, who evaluates the achievement levels of subjects expected. I sincerely wish to create such a self-progressive, motivational culture in the learning- teaching process. Blended with that verification, this Teachers' Guide would definitely be a canoe or a raft in this endeavor.

**Ven. Dr. Mabulgoda Sumanarathana Thero**  
**Deputy Director General**  
**Faculty of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences**

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## Introduction

Revised English Language and Literature syllabus for grades 12 and 13 is presented to the general education system of Sri Lanka based on the following considerations.

1. Retaining of the 13 key competencies introduced to the secondary English language curriculum in the year 2010.
2. Presenting 51 specific competencies / competency levels identified as relevant and suitable for grades 12 and 13. The distribution of these competencies is given in the grid below.
3. Identification of learning outcomes expected at the end of the learning teaching process.
4. Presentation of basic guidelines and limits of the content for teachers and material developers.

Competency	No. of C. levels
1	Identifies and analyses themes, literary techniques and the use of language in creating different levels of meaning.
2	Recognizes the main features of prose and poetry.
3	Recognizes the basic characteristics of different literary genres.
4	Makes inferences correctly, and reads insightfully.
5	Responds to and engages with the texts in relation to imagery, ideas, emotions, attitudes, context etc.
6	Develops a personal response to texts through critical thinking and analysis.
7	Presents a personal critical response to the literary texts using appropriate conventions of academic/formal essay writing.
8	Presents relevant aspects/ issues /episodes connected to the topic.
9	Discusses, substantiates and illustrates point of view.

10	Writes accurately and uses appropriate structure and vocabulary.
11	Paraphrases where necessary in his/her own words.
12	Employs appropriate strategies to summarize while retaining the meaning of the original text.
13	Identifies, analyses and responds to literary elements in unforeseen texts of prose and poetry.

In designing the syllabus no particular method or approach was specially considered and therefore, teachers, teacher educators and administrators are requested to be creative and independent to select the best possible method to achieve success in teaching and learning. Further, the teachers and material developers are requested to pay special attention to achieve national goals and competencies through teaching of English in Sri Lanka to ensure sustainable development within a peaceful and harmonious country.

### **National Goals**

- (i) Nation building and the establishment of a Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of national cohesion, national integrity, national unity, harmony, and peace, and recognizing cultural diversity in Sri Lanka's plural society within a concept of respect for human dignity.
- (ii) Recognizing and conserving the best elements of the nation's heritage while responding to the challenges of a changing world.
- (iii) Creating and supporting an environment imbued with the norms of social justice and a democratic way of life that promotes respect for human rights, awareness of duties and obligations, and a deep and abiding concern for one another.
- (iv) Promoting the mental and physical well-being of individuals and a sustainable life style based on respect for human values.

- (v) Developing creativity, initiative, critical thinking, responsibility, accountability and other positive elements of a well- integrated and balanced personality.
- (vi) Human resource development by educating for productive work that enhances the quality of life of the individual and the nation and contributes to the economic development of Sri Lanka.
- (vii) Preparing individuals to adapt to and manage change, and to develop capacity to cope with complex and unforeseen situations in a rapidly changing world.
- (viii) Fostering attitudes and skills that will contribute to securing an honorable place in the international community, based on justice, equality and mutual respect.

### **Basic competencies**

The following Basic Competencies developed through education will contribute to achieve the above National Goals:

**(i) Competencies in Communication**

**Competencies in communication are based on four subsets: Literacy, Numeracy, Graphics and IT proficiency.**

- Literacy: Listen attentively, speak clearly, read for meaning, write accurately and lucidly and communicate ideas effectively.
- Numeracy: Use numbers for things, space and time, count, calculate and measure systematically.
- Graphics: Make sense of line and form, express and record details, instructions and ideas with line form and colour.
- IT proficiency: Computer literacy and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in learning, in the work environment and in personal life.

**(ii) Competencies relating to Personality Development**

- Generic skills such as creativity, divergent thinking, initiative, decision making, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking, team work, inter – personal relations, discovering and exploring ;
- Values such as integrity, tolerance and respect for human dignity;
- Emotional intelligence.

**(iii) Competencies relating to the Environment**

These competencies relate to the environment: social, biological and physical.

Social Environment - Awareness of the national heritage, sensitivity and skills linked to being members of a plural society, concern for distributive justice, social relationships, personal conduct, general and legal conventions, rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations.

Biological Environment - Awareness, sensitivity and skills linked to the living world, people and the ecosystem, the trees, forests, seas, water, air and life – plant, animal and human life.

Physical Environment - Awareness, sensitivity and skills linked to space, energy, fuels, matter, materials and their links with human living, food, clothing, shelter, health, comfort, respiration, sleep, relaxation, rest, wastes and excretion.

Included here are skills in using tools and technologies for learning, working and living.

**(iv) Competencies relating to preparation for the World of Work.**

Employment related skills to maximize their potential and to enhance their capacity

- To contribute to economic development
- To discover their vocational interests and aptitudes
- To choose a job that suits their abilities, and
- To engage in a rewarding and sustainable livelihood

**(v) Competencies in relation to Religion and Ethics**

Assimilating and internalizing values, so that individuals may function in a manner consistent with the ethical, moral and religious modes of conduct in everyday living, selecting that which is most appropriate.

**(vi) Competencies in Play and the Use of Leisure**

Emotions of Pleasure, Joy, and such human experiences as expressed through aesthetics, literature, play, sports and athletics, leisure pursuits and other creative modes of living.

**(vii) Competencies relating to ‘ learning to learn’**

Empowering individuals to learn independently and to be sensitive and successful in responding to and managing change through a transformative process, in a rapidly changing, complex and interdependent world.

# Objectives

## Objectives of the G.C. E (A/L) syllabus

At the end of the two year course of studies, the learners should be able to:

- read competently any literary text in English and write confidently in clear grammatical English.
- distinguish the main literary genres and the techniques used therein.
- respond to literature sensitively and develop a critical outlook.
- enhance skills for literary as well as non-literary discourse.
- develop a humanistic attitude to the world around them, both human and non-human, as a result of the deeper perceptions learners have achieved.

### Suggested Time Allocation for Teaching

Poetry	70	Periods
Short Stories	65	Periods
Drama	50	Periods
Novels	45	Periods
Language	120	Periods

Total 350 hours

Periods: 175 (Gr. 12)

175 (Gr. 13)

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350

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**350** No. of periods in total (Gr.12 &13)

Competency	Competency Level	Subject Content	Learning Outcome	No of Periods	Basic Competency
<p><b>Part 1</b></p> <p>1. Identifies and analyses themes, literary techniques and the use of language in creating different levels of meaning.</p>	<p>1.1 Understands the concept of theme</p> <p>1.2 Becomes aware of the special use of language in the literary text/s set for study</p> <p>1.3 Identifies themes in selected contexts through experiential learning</p> <p>1.4 Recognizes literary techniques in the texts selected for study.</p> <p>1.5 Analyzes themes in the selected context and relates techniques to the development of the themes.</p> <p>1.6 Examines how the themes are developed in the structure of the texts selected for study.</p> <p>1.7 Evaluates the overall effect created by the use of language and literary techniques</p> <p>1.8 Compares and contrasts the development of themes in a range of texts.</p>	<p><b><u>POETRY</u></b></p> <p>The Chimney Sweeper - William Blake</p> <p>Animal Crackers - Richard de Zoysa</p> <p>Design - Robert Frost</p> <p>Go and Catch a Falling Star - John Donne</p> <p><b><u>SHORT STORIES</u></b></p> <p>Action and Reaction - Chitra Fernando</p>	<p>Students will be able to identify the themes in a text, how language and literary techniques are used and contribute to the development of the central ideas in a literary work.</p>	<p>20</p>	<p>i, ii, iii</p>



	identified above enrich the text/weaken it.	<p>An Introduction - Kamala Das Money - Philip Larkin</p> <p><b><u>DRAMA</u></b> The Tempest - William Shakespeare</p> <p><b><u>SHORT STORIES</u></b> Eveline - James Joyce</p> <p><b><u>Novels</u></b> July's People - Nadine Gordimer Tess of the d'Urbervilles - Thomas Hardy</p>			
4 Makes inferences correctly, and reads insightfully.	<p>4.1 Observes the presence of the unstated</p> <p>4.2 Identifies the significance of implied meanings in the unstated</p> <p>4.3 Interprets the unstated plausibly.</p> <p>4.4 Improves the quality of thoughts and feelings through additional reading.</p>	<p><b><u>POETRY</u></b> Sonnet 73 - William Shakespeare Spring and Fall – Gerard Manley Hopkins An Unknown Girl - Moniza Alvi Suicide in the Trenches – Siegfried Sassoon</p> <p><b><u>DRAMA</u></b> The Dumb Waiter – Harold Pinter Sizwe Bansi is Dead – Athol Fugard</p> <p><b><u>SHORT STORIES</u></b> Interpreter of Maladies – Jhumpa Lahiri</p>	Students will be able to identify and articulate the implied meaning of a given text.	40	i, iv, vii

<p>5. Responds to and engages with the texts in relation to imagery, ideas, emotions, attitudes, context etc.</p>	<p>5.1 Understands the concept of imagery (how objects in the world are transformed to images in literature)</p> <p>5.2 Knows the terminology and recognizes different kinds of imagery as:</p> <p>a) Sensory: e.g. visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile</p> <p>b) Literary devices e.g. simile, metaphor, symbol</p> <p>5.3 Understands the relationship between image and effect.</p> <p>5.4 Analyzes and responds to the effect created by the imagery in terms of ideas, emotions and attitudes.</p> <p>5.5 Relates text to its socio-cultural background.</p>	<p><b><u>POETRY</u></b>  Phenomenal Woman  – Maya Angelou  Explosion  – Vivimarie Vanderpoorten  A Slumber did my Spirit Seal  – William Wordsworth  Batter my Heart – John Donne</p> <p><b><u>SHORT STORIES</u></b>  Everyday Use - Alice Walker</p> <p><b><u>NOVELS</u></b>  The Remains of the Day  – Kazuo Ishiguro  Nectar in a Sieve  – Kamala Markandaya</p>	<p>Students will be able to recognize and respond to different types of imagery and evaluate their significance and relevance in relation to different texts. ideas, emotions and socio-cultural context.</p>	<p>40</p>	<p>i,iii,v</p>
<p>6. Develops a personal response to a text through critical thinking and analysis.</p>	<p>6.1 Uses parameters mentioned above to analyze selected texts and empathize with context, characters, emotions /attitudes.</p> <p>6.2 Relates ideas/emotions and attitudes generated by the text to one’s personal experience / world knowledge</p> <p>6.3 Scrutinizes them in relation to one’s own reality / understanding of the world.</p> <p>6.4 Improves the quality of thought</p>	<p><b><u>POETRY</u></b>  Among School Children  - W.B. Yeats  The Cathedral Builders  - John Ormond  Morning at the Window – T.S. Eliot  Ode to a Nightingale - John Keats</p> <p><b><u>SHORT STORIES</u></b>  The Thing around your Neck – Chimamanda Adichie</p>	<p>Students will be able to articulate a particular stance through critical reading and reflection.</p>	<p>40</p>	<p>i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi,vii</p>

	and feeling through reading.	<b><u>NOVELS</u></b> Life of Pi – Yann Martel			
<b><u>Part 2</u></b> 7. Presents a personal critical response to the literary texts using appropriate conventions of academic/formal essay writing.	7.1 Uses an appropriate essay format of writing to express response. 7.2 Cites textual evidence appropriately to support analysis. 7.3 Refers to recommended sources/materials to extend and sharpen their opinions.	Selected prose and poetry extracts from the contents included in Part I. Unseen texts, variety of language texts	Students will be able to structure and present their response to a text and provide evidence by citing primary and secondary materials effectively.	20	i,ii,iii,iv
8. Presents relevant aspects/ issues /episodes connected to the topic.	8.1 Prioritizes aspects/issues episodes 8.2 Selects a framework for presenting the material 8.3 Organizes the material	Language genres: reports, articles, newspaper materials, extracts from academic texts etc.	8. Students will be able to organize and present the relevant material pertaining to a topic in an organized manner	20	i, ii, iv
9. Discusses, substantiates and illustrates point of view.	9.1 Sees context from different points of view. 9.2 Selects linguistic/structural form for different points of view. 9.3 Relates the different points of view to a central stand point.	Selected contents from part I, Extracts from language texts selected from different language genres	9. Students will be able to present different perspectives on a given topic/text, provide evidence, and distinguish between a fact and an opinion.	10	i,ii,iv,vii

10. Writes accurately and uses appropriate structure and vocabulary.	10.1 Writes with appropriate grammatical structures. 10.2 Uses correct grammatical structures. 10.3 Uses appropriate vocabulary with nuances where necessary. 10.4 Selects organizational structures and writes clear grammatical prose carrying the tempo of thought and feeling.	Inputs from grammar source books, model essays from famous writers, newspapers and journal materials.	10. Students will be able to organize and present their ideas accurately and fluently in the written form.	10	i, iv
11. Paraphrases where necessary in his/her own words.	11.1 Recognizes words and word groups that need explanation in context. 11.2 Relates a given text /idea without affecting its meaning. 11.3 Writes clearly grammatically correct prose.	Selected contents from Part I, unseen passages of prose and poetry selected as appropriate by teachers	11. Students will be able to differentiate between the main ideas and supporting details of a text and rewrite it in their own language coherently and cohesively.	20	i, iv
12. Employs appropriate strategies to summarize while retaining the meaning of the original text.	12.1 Avoids repetition and illustration in explaining complex phrases and words. 12.2 Omits irrelevant details and writes the main ideas in their own words. 12.3 Avoids ambiguity.	Variety of language and literary texts selected by teachers, unseen passages, reports and articles from newspapers and similar materials	12. Students will be able to write the main ideas and organize their writing concisely and cohesively.	20	i, ii, iv
13. Identifies, analyses and responds to literary	13.1 Develops an impression of the given text. 13.2 Identifies the literary techniques	Unseen passages of Prose, Poetry and Drama	13. Students will be able to apply their knowledge of	20	i,ii, vi

elements in unforeseen texts of prose and poetry.	by name and their contribution to the meanings of a text. 13.3 Evaluates the technique within the process of production/ creation.		literary analysis and respond to the unseen texts and present it in a written format.		
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## **Content**

### **Introduction to the syllabus**

#### **1. Drama**

1. Othello (William Shakespeare)
2. Tempest (William Shakespeare)
3. The Glass Menagerie (Tennessee Williams)
4. The Dumb Waiter (Harold Pinter)
5. Sizwe Bansi is Dead (Athol Fugard)

#### **2. Novel**

1. Tess of d'Urbervilles (Thomas Hardy)
2. Nectar in a Sieve (Kamala Markandya)
3. July's People (Nadine Gordimer)
4. The Remains of the Day (Kazuo Ishiguro)
5. Life of Pi (Yan Martel)

#### **3. Short stories**

1. Eveline (James Joyce)
2. Cat in the Rain (Ernest Hemmingway)
3. Everyday Use (Alice Walker)
4. Action and Reaction (Chitra Fernando)
5. Interpreter of Maladies (Jhumpa Lahiri)
6. Thing Around your Neck (Chimamanda Adichie)

#### 4. Poetry

1. Sonnet 73 - That time of year thou may'st in me behold (William Shakespeare)
2. Sonnet 141- In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes (William Shakespeare)
3. Batter my Heart (John Donne)
4. Go and Catch a Falling Star (John Donne)
5. Mr Oldham (John Dryden)
6. Extract from Canto 3: A two edged weapon with a shrimp case ..... Glittering fragments lie (Alexander Pope)
7. Chimney Sweeper – Songs of Innocence (William Blake)
8. To a Snowdrop ( William Wordsworth)
9. A Slumber did my Spirit Seal ( William Wordsworth)
10. An Ode to a Nightingale (John Keats)
11. Spring and Fall (Gerard Manley Hopkins)
12. Remember (Christina Rosetti)
13. Suicide in the Trenches ( Siegfried Sassoon)
14. Among School Children (W. B. Yeats)
15. Morning at the Window ( T.S Eliot)
16. Design ( Robert Frost)
17. Money ( Phillip Larkin)
18. Phenomenal woman (Maya Angelou)
19. An Introduction ( Kamala Das)
20. Fisherman Mourned by his Wife (Patrick Fernando)
21. Animal Crackers ( Richard de Zoysa)

22. Cathedral Builders (John Ormond)
23. Unknown Girl ( Moniza Alvi)
24. Explosion ( Vivimarie Vanderpoorten)

## **5. Guidelines for Language Competency**

## **6. Guidelines for School-based Assessment**

## **Introduction to the syllabus**

A syllabus can be viewed holistically or globally, that is, as a document that outlines everything that will be covered in a classroom (Oxford Learning Dictionary), or more specifically as ‘a plan outlining the subjects or books to be studied in particular course that leads to an examination (Cambridge Dictionary). Viewed either way, a syllabus comprises the following areas:

- i. Goals for learning and teaching
- ii. Objectives of learning and teaching
- iii. Selected content for teaching and learning
- iv. Modes of instruction including methods of teaching and learning
- v. Modes of assessment

The syllabus for GCE Advanced Level English (73) has incorporated the points (i) and (ii) in absorbing the National Goals and Competencies. Under point (iii), the concept of ‘rationalization’ was utilized as required by curriculum planners of the National Institute of Education. This was effected by:

- (a) Review, re-examination and reformulation of objectives in the statement of competencies,
- (b) Selection of content which was subjected to a process of retention, rejection and inclusion of new content. For this purpose, the committee members’ knowledge and experience as teacher educators and curriculum developers was used as well as knowledge obtained about the implementation of the existing syllabus. The ‘rationalization’ was based on the following:

- (c) Retention of 20% of the existing content. This was on the principle and understanding that teaching and learning would continue without a breakdown between the design of the forthcoming syllabus and its implementation. Teachers

are familiar with the retained content and would be prepared for teaching as soon as the new A/L syllabus is implemented in 2017.

- (b) Retention of 60% of the authors/poets in the existing syllabus with new texts/poems selected for study. This step too is expected to facilitate the instructional process as teachers are familiar with the background, style of writings and themes of such writers.
- (c) Introduction of new content which would form only 20 % of the syllabus. This step was taken to invigorate and vitalize teachers and students by challenging them to contend with new learning experiences. These new texts have received high acclaim as winners of some of the world's renowned awards and hence would inspire teachers and students.

This *Teachers' Guide* is designed to facilitate the teaching and process of the GCE (Advance Level) English syllabus introduced in 2017. For each text, information has been provided about the socio-cultural background of the author and text, analysis and possible interpretations and suggestions for future reading. The contents under each text are fairly extensive, but the creative nature of literary texts demand further exploration. Materials from the existing *Teachers' Instructional Manual* are also included in this, where necessary. Hence, wider and more intensive reading is required on the part of the teacher. They should encourage further exploration of diverse interpretations of texts in their classrooms. General modes of assessment indicate that each text will demand special appraisal and evaluation which will challenge the teacher to design individualized methods of assessment.

# Drama

# 1.1 Introduction

## 1.1.1. What is Drama?

‘Drama’ means a specific mode of narrative represented in performance. The term comes from the Greek word ‘drama’, meaning action, which is originated in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century verb, ‘dran’, means ‘do, act’. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) in his treatise called *Poetics* (335 BC) used the word ‘drama’ to describe poetic compositions that were acted in front of audiences in a theatre: Aristotle explains that drama is the imitation of an action and the “form proper to the stage” (Shepherd and Wallis, 2004). Yet, as the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2015) states, the word ‘drama’ is commonly used to refer to “a play for theatre, radio, or television” or to “an exciting, emotional, or unexpected event or circumstance”. As a genre in literature in academic enquiry, ‘drama’ means “a composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or to tell a story usually involving conflicts and emotions through action and dialogue and typically designed for theatrical performance”, as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary(2015). As a literary genre in in academic enquiry, it refers to dramatic performances in theatres.

It is imperative to define the word ‘theatre’ which derives from “late Middle English: from Old French, or from Latin theatrum, from Greek theatron, from theasthai ‘behold’” (OED). It often refers to a building or outdoor area in which drama and other dramatic performances are given. As Shepherd and Wallis state, ‘theatre’ entitles “an activity, a building and a cultural institution” (2004). The term is used to refer to “the activity or profession of acting in, producing, directing, or writing plays” or to “a play or other activity or presentation considered in terms of its dramatic quality”( OED).InLee A. Jacobus’s definition of the word, ‘drama’, he describes its ingredients:

the primary ingredients of drama are characters, represented by players; action, described by gestures and movements; thought, implied by dialogue, words and action; spectacle, represented by scenery, music, and costumes; and finally audiences, who respond to this complex mixture (Jacobus, 2001, p.1).

Jacobus's focus is on the structure and the actions and theatrical property of drama. However, Martin Esslin suggests that "essential ingredients" of drama are "heightened intensity of incident and emotion" (1987, 23-24).

As suggested in all the definitions, drama commonly refers to actions; as a literary genre, the focus is on dramatic performances in theatres, and as Esslin's definition highlights, drama connects with and expresses features of the human mind and emotions. Significant elements of drama are:

- 1. Character:** A Character is a person or other being in a play; person/persons who appear/s in the play, major characters/minor characters, hero/heroines/villains, protagonists/antagonists (principle rival of the protagonist), stereotype or stock character (a character who appears in various forms in many plays)
- 2. Plot:** A plot in a play is usually structured with acts and scenes. It refers to events related to each other in a pattern or a sequence.
- 3. Theme:** The theme of a drama is its message and central concerns. Simply, the theme is the answer to the question, "what is the drama about?". Many plays contain several, rather than a single theme. Also, themes could vary from a conflict between human law and the law of the gods, such as racial segregation and migrants' alienation.
- 4. Dialogue:** Dialogue provides the substance of a play; each word uttered by the character furthers the business of the play, and contributes to its effect as a whole.
- 5. Conventions:** This term refers to dramatic techniques such as the chorus in the Greek theatre, soliloquy, asides-remarks made to the audience, and flashbacks.
- 6. Genre:** This refers to the style or category of drama; for example, tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, romance, horror, fantasy, histories.
- 7. Audience:** A group of individuals together at a certain time and place to see the performances. They usually have an artistic self-awareness. They are expected to use their imagination to participate in the play vicariously while separated from the action.

**8. Stagecraft:** This term is used to mean theatre space. For instance, the part of a theatre stage in front of the curtain is called proscenium. The term “the thrust stage (platform stage / open stage) is used to refer to the stage that extends into the auditorium so that the audience is seated around three sides. The thrust stages also connected to the backstage area. This form was often used in ancient Greek, Elizabethan, Classical, Spanish, Restoration, Japanese and Chinese theatre.

**9. Lighting:** The term, lighting, is used to refer to the techniques/strategies used to illuminate the stage, and the performers, and to create mood and control the focus of the spectators. Stage lighting may be from a direct source such as the sun or a lamp, or it may be indirect, employing reflected light, or general illumination

The following notes show, in brief, the historical development of drama by mapping out further a range of understandings of drama.

### **1.1.2 Greek Drama**

The Greeks of the fifth century can be credited with the first dramatic age, although drama had its beginnings in religious rituals, and remains part of religious festivals. Dramas may have evolved from Egyptian and Greek rituals that were performed the same way again and again, and were thought to have an encouraging effect on the relationship between the people and their gods (Jacobus, 2001): the earliest complete surviving play is Aeschylus’ tragedy, *The Suppliant Women*. Aeschylus’ drama is concerned with general moral judgments, the relations of mankind to the Gods, and the universe. He was followed by Sophocles. Aeschylus and Sophocles modified religious legend, adapting it to their own ideals, interpreting it so as to address their own moral standard. For instance, Euripides, takes the myth just as he finds them, and contrives his dramas so as to bring the absurdities into relief.

A chorus is a group of actors in Greek drama. Gradually, they came to occupy the role of commentators on the dramatic action. In Elizabethan drama, the chorus sometimes occurs in the person of an individual actor, speaking a prologue, and occasional explanatory linking passages (e.g. Henry V, and Pericles). In modern theatre there have been sporadic returns to the idea of a chorus (usually now a single actor) as a commentator on the action, stepping in and out of it at will (e.g. in Bertolt Brecht’s drama).

### 1.1.3 Miracle and Mystery Plays

By the end of the thirteenth century there was a flourishing tradition of religious drama allied with the Church all over Europe. Although these plays contributed largely to religious church service, little by little, the drama began to be moved from the church to the churchyard and from the churchyard to the market place. Mystery plays were similar to miracle plays and sometimes the two terms were interpreted as interchangeable.

However, unlike Miracle plays, Mystery plays presented strictly biblical subjects, and evolved from plays presented in Latin by members of the Church (Alex Matsuo, 2014). Among Mystery plays, Abraham and Isaac, Noah's Flood, The Second Shepherd's Play were popular: The pun on religious mystery was understood by audiences (Jacobus, 2001). On the other hand, Miracle plays, as stated in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, present a real or fictitious account of the life, miracles, or martyrdom of a saint, and often concern either the Virgin Mary, St. Nicholas or the 4<sup>th</sup>-century bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. Typical of these is a drama called *St. John the Hairy*.

### 1.1.4 Morality Plays

Towards the latter part of the fifteenth century, the Miracle and Mystery plays began to be replaced in popularity by a new form called Morality plays. This type of religious drama was an allegorical piece in which personified virtues and vices grappled for the soul of man; where a lot of grotesquery and broad humour was carried over from the mystery. Their purpose was "to touch on larger contemporary issues that had a moral overtone" (Jacobus, 2001). The most famous of these was *Everyman*. Another type of drama popular in medieval times was the interlude, which can be generally defined as a dramatic work with characteristics of the morality play that is primarily intended for entertainment.

### 1.1.5 Renaissance Drama

Renaissance, as defined in the OED, is the revival of European art and literature under the influence of classical models in the 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The English Renaissance was a cultural and artistic movement in England dating from the late 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. As stated

by Jacobus, “the revival of learning in the Renaissance, beginning in Italy in the fourteenth century, had considerable effect on drama because classical Greek and Roman plays were discovered and studied”(2001,8). The Renaissance which began in Italy during the 14th century and reached its height in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, spread to the rest of Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This revival is shown through the dramas of this period in England.

English Renaissance drama started when Elizabeth-I was the Queen of England from 1558 to 1603. Dramatists such as Christopher Marlow, William Shakespeare and Ben Johnson can be considered as significant contributors to drama in this period. Their ‘history plays’ and tragedies such as *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Doctor Faustus* were popular among audiences. Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As you like it* and *Twelfth Night*, and Ben Johnson’s *The Alchemist*, *Everyman* are a few comedies of the era. These plays were “constructed of remarkable language that seems to have fascinated all social classes, since all flocked to the theatre by the thousands” (Jacobus, 2001, p.9). However, during the Puritan reign in England from 1642 to 1660, the importance given to dramas began to decline. The theatres were closed and dramatic productions gradually became non-existent. Since the mid-1660s onwards, modelled by French theatre, new indoor theatre started, and new actors came forth to join the theatre productions. For instance, French playwrights, by interpreting Aristotle’s definition of Greek drama, leaned towards the development of classical drama. Moliere is considered to be one of the greatest masters of comedy in Western literature.

### **1.1.6 Eighteenth Century Drama**

The drama of the eighteenth century focussed on the tradition of the comedies, social manners and satires. In other words, the eighteenth century drama offered “mild criticism of society and holds society up to comic ridicule” (Jacobus, 2001, p.9). French theatre, during this period, was controlled by a small group of snobbish people and often centred on the court. However, the situation in England was not the same. Although the audiences were snobbish, people in England went to theatre “to be seen ... and to express their views” (Jacobus, 2001, p.10). Significant dramatists of this period are Sir Richard Steele, Henry Fielding, and Edward Moore.

### 1.1.7 Nineteenth Century Drama

English dramatists produced more than thirty thousand dramas during the nineteenth century, reflecting the interest and popularity in dramas (Jacobus, 2001). Many of these dramas were, however, melodramatic or sentimental or they were often dominated by the leading actors. The audiences were different from those of the eighteenth century. They were not actually interested in intellectually demanding dramas, but dramas which entertain them. The reason for this change is the “upwardly mobile urban middle classes and the moneyed factory and mill owners” who preferred entertainment dramas to serious, thought-provoking ones (Jacobus, 2001, 9). Thus, adaptations of Shakespeare were common, and thrillers were popular among the audiences.

However, a new Realist movement emerged with the achievements of French novelists such as Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert beginning from the 1870s. August Strindberg (Swedish playwright) and Henrik Ibsen (Norwegian playwright) are two significant contributors to the period. Russian dramatists such as Anton Chekov, Nikolai Gogol and Maxim Gorki and Leo Tolstoy’s contribution to the field of drama was also significant: their dramas are realistic, satiric, and also “patient examinations of character”(Jacobus, 2001, 9).

### 1.1.8 Twentieth Century Drama

The early twentieth century drama developed the tradition of the nineteenth century realistic drama: the drama of this period also experimented with the audience expectations. For instance, Eugene O’Neill’s tragedies such as *Desire under the Elms*, often feature the ordinary people rather than the noble; Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* shows dreadful experiences of the commercial ordinary businessman. In other words, the early twentieth century dramas suggest that the ordinary man’s life can be as tragic as Shakespeare’s Oedipus’ or Hamlet’s life. Another significant feature in the twentieth century drama is the presence of expressionist characteristics: expressionism is a movement in which the image of reality is distorted in order to make it expressive of the character’s inner feelings. Expressionist dramatists also often portray the technological impact on people, through devices such as telegraphic dialogue, phonograph and telephone. The use of digital screen shows how technology is used in dramas. One example

is Tennessee Williams' use, in *The Glass Menagerie*, of an onstage screen on which words and images relevant to the action are projected. The screen is used either to emphasize the importance of something referred to by the characters, or to refer to something from a character's past or fantasy.

In the twentieth century, dramatists around the world responded to the Great Depression, World War I and II and the Communist Revolution. Their plays did not permit audiences to sit comfortably in theatres, but made audiences realize their true condition. Two significant examples are Bertolt Brecht's Epic drama and Samuel Beckett's Absurd drama. Epic drama is a form of drama intended to appeal to reason rather than the emotions responded to the political climate of the time through the creation of a new political theatre. The Theatre of the Absurd, pioneered by dramatists such as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, are originated in the tenets of Surrealism, Dadaism and Existentialism. These movements often flouted conventional cultural and aesthetic values by producing works marked by nonsense, travesty, and incongruity; they also emphasize individual existence, freedom and choice. Besides, dramas emerged in other parts of the world also contributed to a great extent to explore contemporary socio-political conditions. For instance, dramas were produced in South Africa and Nigeria mostly following the lines of political theatre: two prominent dramatists are Athol Fugard and Wole Soyinka.

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## 1.2. *OTHELLO*

By William Shakespeare

### 1.2.1 The Social-Cultural Background of the dramatist and the drama

Shakespeare lived during the early modern period, set between the Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution. The time was characterized by religious and political changes. The Church of England was severed from Rome during the reign of Henry VIII. He established himself as the head of the Church of England. A new English identity was not just promoted by religious independence but also by the reigning Tudor dynasty. (1485-1603). The victory over the Spanish armada further strengthened the English national identity that was emerging.

This era in English history also saw the rise of a capitalist economy. Henry VIII founded the modern English Navy and during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Atlantic exploration and transcontinental trade paved England's way towards becoming an imperial power. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century England was not a significant power in Europe but by the turn of the Century it had become a crucial power centre in that region. London rose in importance. Its many small industries were growing and the city became one of Europe's metropolis. The population which was around 70,000 in 1500 grew to 200,000 by 1600. The city was characterized by public entertainment and theatres were popular. The first theatres were built away from the city for fear of disease. Eg: in Shoreditch – North of London.

Shakespeare began his career during the reign of Elizabeth I. During her reign (1558-1603) England flourished in all aspects. It was known as the Elizabethan or the Golden Age. She was a very popular monarch and patronized the theatre. Shakespeare continued writing even after Elizabeth's demise, well into the reign of James I. James was a strong monarch but leaned towards absolutism in power. He revised the Bible (King James' version). Shakespeare produced some of his greatest plays during the reign of King James. Eg: *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest*. They constitute some of his most tragic plays and deal with some themes such as murder, betrayal, power and lust.

### **1.2.2 The Background of the play**

The plot of the play was based in a tale extracted from a collection called Hecatommithi by Giraldi Cinthio, published in Venice in 1566. The play was probably written in 1603 or 1604, a little past Shakespeare's middle age it was performed at the Royal Court season in 1604 which suggests that the play had been a success. It was apparently a command performance. i.e. on invitation by the court- Richard Burbage, Shakespeare's partner and fellow actor played Othello.

### **1.2.3 The Dramatist - William Shakespeare**

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon, in England, probably in 1564 (generally placed on April 23<sup>rd</sup> because his birth has been registered on 26<sup>th</sup> April of that year). At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway who bore him three children. During 1585 to 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer and part owner of a playing company called The Lord Chamberlain's Men (later known as The King's Men). He appears to have gone back to Stratford around 1613 where he died three years later. There are few reliable records of his life. However there is speculation about his physical appearance, personal life, and religious beliefs and whether he actually wrote the plays attributed to him.

But Shakespearean scholars have reconstructed his life from records of baptisms, registrations and various transactions and deeds. It is established that Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare a successful glove maker and alderman, originally from Snitterfield and Mary Arden, the daughter of an efficient farmer. His marriage was registered at the age of 18. There are records of the baptisms of his children in 1583 and 1585. After 1585, critics and admirers mostly talk of Shakespeare's lost years (1585-1592). Nicholas Rowe suggests that Shakespeare left Stratford to flee the anger of a nobleman whose deer he poached. 18<sup>th</sup> Century scholars suggest that he minded the houses of theatre partners, and Aubrey (19<sup>th</sup> Century) speculates that Shakespeare was a school teacher. It is not clear when he started writing plays but contemporary authors and records of performances reveal that his plays were on stage by 1592. The fact that he was well-known by that time is suggested by the observations made by famous playwrights like Greene who described him as "an upstart crow".

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1590 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories, genres he raised to a peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth considered some of the finest works in the English Language. In his last phase, he wrote romances or tragicomedies and collaborated with other playwrights. Many of his plays were published during his life time but of varying degrees of quality and accuracy. In 1623, two of his former theatre colleagues published the First Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of his plays.

Shakespeare was respected as a poet and playwright in his own day, but his reputation rose to its peak in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Romantics acclaimed him and the Victorians hero - worshipped him. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century his work was repeatedly adopted and rediscovered, by new movements in scholarship and performance. Ben Johnson states that Shakespeare “was not of an age but for all time” (Preface to the *First Folio*). He was known as the ‘Bard’ or the ‘Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon”. He strode the cultural scene for over three decades in Elizabethan England. Hewas a poet and playwright regarded as the greatest writer in the English Language and the world’s greatest dramatist. His surviving works constitute 38 plays 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems and other poems. His plays have been translated into almost all the languages of the world, and performed more than any other playwright’s.

#### **1.2.4 The genre of *Othello***

*Othello* is a tragedy. The essence of tragedy is succinctly summarized below. “Tragedy is an intense exploration of suffering and evil focused on the experience of an exception”(McEachern, 2002). It typically presents:

- (a) a steep fall from prosperity to misery and untimely death
- (b) a great change occasioned or accompanied by conflict between the tragic character and some superior power,
- (c) conflict and change – the first intense if not violent, the second extreme constitute the essence of tragedy. According to Aristotle (the Poetics, chapter 6) success of

the tragedy “depends on its capacity to excite pity and fear thereby effecting a catharsis of these emotions.”

The 20<sup>th</sup> century attitude to tragedy is that it generates contrary responses of attraction and repulsion. Pity draws the audience sympathetically to the protagonist regarding his or her suffering, as unjust or disproportionate. Fear and anxiety are also simultaneously developed which denotes an attitude to the protagonist of dissolution and judgment and acknowledges the righteousness of what has happened. A state of mind in which the powerful and conflicting emotions generated by the spectacle of great suffering are reconciled and transcended through artistic representation : so that a condition of exultant but grave understanding remains.

According to Bradley, one sees conflict within the hero who is a man divided against himself. The modern view of tragedy is summarized as follows.

- (a) It is a genre which projects mutually incompatible world views or value systems.
- (b) It exposes the external contradictions between man’s weakness and his courage, his stupidity and magnificence, his frailties and his strength.

### **1.2.5 Shakespearean tragedy**

Shakespeare, the great innovator and imaginative artist that he was, shaped conventional tragedy for his own purposes, injecting it with his own uniqueness. Shakespeare’s tragedy displays the following features.

- (1) Shakespeare included comic elements and plebeian characters (influenced by the native dramatic tradition).
  - i. Comic elements forestall inappropriate laughter that scenes of great tension and high passion might provoke.
  - ii. Comic relief provided thematic variations and ironic contrasts.
- (2) Shakespeare focused on passion-driven protagonists like Seneca. He departed from classical practice by presenting scenes of violent passion on stage instead of confining them to report (justifying comic relief). In the opening scene,

Shakespeare sought to present a state of conflict either between the protagonist and his community or between two sectors of the community (they relate to the conflict of loyalties, values or conscience within the protagonist himself).

- (3) The concept of change or the phenomenon of change is central to the play. It is not merely a change of worldly features; it is above all one of interpersonal, moral and psychological change. An essential part of the hero's experience is the horrific discovery that the world he knows and values, the people he loves and trusts are changing or changing utterly.
- (4) The audience / reader feels there is a close correspondence between the contradictions of human nature to light and darkness, good and foul weather and the goodness and evil in human beings.
- (5) Polarized transformation (in the Hero), transformation of the community and its representative hero are intimately and causally connected. The extreme and unexpected nature of the change which overtakes the hero is underlined by the bewildered comments of those who know him best.

The change is quick and this is a theatrical device, emphasizing the extremity of change and the vulnerable nature of all love and nobility. Shakespeare emphasizes the human condition through this technique. The hero's fall involves a self-betrayal or loss of identity which contributes a breakdown in the balance of a richly endowed nature, one in which feeling is so powerful that it is never far from the point of destructive excess. The emotions spring from a conflict of loyalties, values or conscience, within the protagonist himself. It is from the Senecan tradition that Shakespeare absorbed the concept of change. To this concept is aligned the fall of the hero. Shakespeare represents that the person transformed here is driven to act with the utmost brutality against one or more of those to whom he is bound by the closest ties. Behind the hero's moral fall is the convention that "in man as in a rough grown grove remain/ cave keeping qualities, that obscurely sleep" (Shakespeare).

### 1.2.6 Positive aspects of Shakespearean tragedy

- (a) Restoration of social order, with an emphasis on reunification and reconciliation.
- (b) The protagonists themselves achieve reunion and reconciliation. The latter entails confirmation of the hero's nobility as well as forgiveness for his rash and ignoble action.
- (c) The experience of evil results in understanding.
- (d) The protagonist's nobility is reflected in the manner in which he meets death. He is constant – true to himself and to his vales. (dying like oneself and like a man).
- (e) At the heart of the play is the central experience of suffering and distress.

Shakespeare conceived his tragic characters as those likely to be remembered for the suffering and grief they endure rather than for the errors and misdeeds.

### 1.2.7 Overview of the play

The play takes place in Venice and Cyprus in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Othello is a Moorish general of Venice, and has promoted Cassio as his lieutenant. Iago, who was expecting the promotion himself, makes plots against both Cassio and Othello to take revenge. The play begins on a street in Venice, in the midst of an argument between Iago and Rodrigo who had been paying Iago to help him in his suit to Desdemona - the daughter of Venetian senator Brabantio. However, Othello has secretly married Desdemona. Iago determines to use Desdemona as the means of his revenge. Brabantio finds Desdemona missing and gathers some officers to find Othello. Iago meanwhile returns to Othello, hiding his animosity and pretending to be loyal to Othello. Before Brabantio sees him at Othello's lodgings, Cassio arrives with an urgent message from the Duke. Othello's help is needed to ward off the imminent Turkish threat to Cyprus. Soon after Brabantio arrives with Rodrigo and others to accuse Othello of stealing his daughter by witchcraft. When he understands that Othello has left to meet the Duke, Brabantio also goes there and accuses Othello before the senate. Brabantio's plan fails as the Duke and the senators are sympathetic to Othello.

Given the chance to speak, Othello explains that he loved and won Desdemona not by witchcraft but with the stories of his adventures in travel and war. The duke finds Othello's explanation convincing and at this point Desdemona herself enters to defend her choice in marriage and she announces to her father that now her loyalty is to her husband. Brabantio is dejected but concedes the legality of the senate's decision and allows it to proceed. The Duke commands that Othello should go to Cyprus to defend it against the Turks. Desdemona is resolved to go with him.

In Cyprus the following day, two gentlemen stand on the shore with Montano the governor. A third gentleman enters and announces that the Turkish fleet is wrecked due to a storm. Cassio arrives unhurt, followed soon after by a second ship carrying Iago, Rodrigo, Desdemona and Emilia. Once they have landed, Othello's ship is sighted. As they wait for Othello, Cassio greets Desdemona warmly, clasping her hand. Watching this Iago tells the audience that he will use "as little a web as this [handshake] to ensnare Cassio." (ii.i.69). Othello arrives, greets his wife passionately and announces that there will be revelry that night, as Cyprus has been saved, from the Turks. Once everyone leaves, Rodrigo complains to Iago that he has no chance of breaking up Othello's marriage. Iago assures him that very soon Desdemona will tire of Othello and she will turn to Cassio. Iago advises Rodrigo to subject Cassio to disgrace at the revels. In his soliloquy Iago reveals his plans. First step is to remove Cassio. That night Iago gets Cassio drunk and sends Rodrigo to fight with him. Provoked by Rodrigo, Cassio chases Rodrigo and the Governor Montano tries to stop him and Cassio stabs him. Iago sends Rodrigo to raise the alarm.

The alarm is rung and Othello appears on the scene. When Othello demands to know the truth Iago pretends hesitation but later implicates Cassio, hiding his own conspiracy. Othello punishes Cassio and strips him of his rank as lieutenant. Cassio is penitent about what he had done and laments to Iago that his reputation is ruined forever. Iago assures him that he can get it back by appealing to Desdemona. In a soliloquy he tells the audience that he will frame Cassio and Desdemona as lovers to awaken Othello's jealousy. In order to reconcile with Othello, Cassio sends some musicians to play beneath Othello's window. Othello sends his clown to send away the musicians. Hoping to get an appointment with Desdemona Cassio asks the clown to send Emilia to him. After the clown goes away, Iago tells Cassio that he will send Othello out of the way, so that he could speak with Desdemona. Othello, Iago and a gentleman go to explore some of the town's fortifications.

Desdemona is quite sympathetic to Cassio's request and promises she will do everything she could to make Othello reinstate him. When Cassio is about to leave Othello returns. Cassio leaves hurriedly without talking to Othello. Othello inquires from Iago whether it was Cassio who parted from his wife and Iago uses this opportunity to kindle Othello's jealousy. Iago's response is; "No, sure, I cannot think it.... That he would steal away so guilty like, seeing your coming" (III. iii 37-39). Othello becomes upset and moody and Iago further rouses Othello's suspicion and jealousy by suggesting that Cassio and Desdemona are involved in an affair. Desdemona's earnest entreaties to reinstate Cassio adds fuel to the already roused suspicions of Othello. After Othello's conversation with Iago, Desdemona comes to call him to supper and finds him ill. She offers him her handkerchief to wrap round his head, but he finds it too little and lets it drop. Desdemona and Othello go to dinner and Emilia finds the handkerchief exclaiming that Iago wanted her to steal it. Iago is overjoyed when Emilia gives him the handkerchief which he places in Cassio's room as evidence of his affair with Desdemona. When Othello demands "ocular proof" (III.III.368) that his wife is unfaithful. Iago says that he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with the handkerchief – the first gift Othello gave Desdemona. Othello vows to take revenge on his wife and Cassio and Iago vows to help him. When Othello sees Desdemona later he demands the handkerchief but she tells him that she does not have it with her and attempts to change the topic, by continuing her suit on Cassio's behalf. This drives Othello into further rage and he storms out. Later, Cassio who comes back wonders about the handkerchief, he has just found in his chamber. He is greeted by Bianca (a prostitute he has befriended) to whom he gives the handkerchief to copy its embroidery on his behalf. Emilia away.

Meanwhile Iago assures Rodrigo that he will realize his suit with Desdemona if he kills Cassio. He urges Rodrigo to ambush Cassio. But Rodrigo misses and Cassio injures Rodrigo. Hearing their cries Ludovica and Graziano rush in. Iago wounds Cassio and runs away. When Othello hears Cassio's cry, he assumes that Cassio is killed. But Ludovico and Graziano who come there take away the wounded Cassio. Iago returns and kills Rodrigo to hide his conspiracy. Othello stands over his sleeping wife in their bed chamber, preparing to kill her. She pleads her innocence but he smothers her. Emilia enters with the news that Rodrigo is killed. Othello asks if Cassio is dead and is mortified when she answers in the negative. Desdemona cries out that she is murdered, but changes her stance before she dies, suggesting that she committed suicide.

Emilia asks Othello about what happened. He confesses that he killed Desdemona. Montano, Graziano and Iago come in roused by Emilia's cries. Iago threatens to silence Emilia who has by now realized what Iago had done. At first Othello tells them that Iago had told him the truth citing the incident of the handkerchief. Emilia tells them how she had been instrumental in getting the handkerchief for Iago. Othello is devastated by the unfolding of this fact. He tries to kill Iago but is disarmed. Iago kills Emilia and tries to run away, but is caught and held captive by Montano and Ludovico. They bring in Cassio who is wounded. Othello wounds Iago. He is asked to come to Venice to face his trial. Othello makes a very moving speech about how he would like to be remembered and kills himself with a weapon he had on his person. The play closes with a speech by Ludovico. He gives Othello's house and goods to Graziano and orders that Iago be executed.

### **1.2.8 Structure of the Play**

#### ❖ Act I & II - Venice

##### 1. Initial situation

Othello and Desdemona fall in love and elope to get married.

##### 2. Conflict

- (a) Father Brabantio is roused against the relationship and appeals to the court of Venice.
- (b) Parallel to this war begins with Turkey over Cyprus.
- (c) Iago's plot against Othello begins.

#### ❖ Act III – Venice → Cyprus

##### 3. Complication

Iago's convoluted machinations.

- a. Puts Rodrigo against Cassio.
- b. Othello against Cassio.
- c. Othello against Desdemona.

## Cyprus

### 4. Climax

Iago convinces Othello about Desdemona's deceit. He ensnares Othello by his own jealous thoughts. Othello reaches a psychological climax of his own deception. Iago dominates Othello's mind totally.

## ❖ Act IV & V → Cyprus

### 5. Suspense

There is a time span between the thought and the act. The audience awaits the final act.

Will Othello kill Desdemona?

Will Iago get away with his crime?

## Cyprus

### 6. Denouement

Starts as soon as Desdemona dies. Minutes after Desdemona's death Emilia reveals the truth – that Iago is behind the plot. She reveals all to Othello. Iago kills Emilia. Othello attempt to kill Iago, fails and stabs himself.

## ❖ Act VI

### 7. Conclusion

Cassio survives and is appointed governor of Cyprus (restoration of order). Iago refuses to talk. He does not offer any explanation about his actions. Ludovico orders Iago to be executed.

## 1.2.9 Characterization

### Othello

Othello sometimes presents himself as an outsider because he recognizes his exotic appeal and he is self-conscious and defensive about his difference from other Venetians. Othello is extremely refined and poetic in his speech. But he allows his eloquence to suffer as he is put under strain by Iago's plots. Nevertheless he resumes his composure and seduces his co-players on stage as well as the off-stage audience in his last speech. Othello has a romantic streak in him – he exalted love for Desdemona, his deeply emotional involvement with his mother's love symbol, and his passionate concern with honour. While he is noble and grand in his thoughts and bearing he is prone to jealousy and Iago exploits this trait to the full. In Othello one sees the fall of the 'tragic hero.' He is the 'noble moor', the man who could mesmerize his audience with his speech- the indomitable military general, fearless and honest (he had no compunction about punishing Cassio for his disorderly behaviour). For him killing Desdemona was obligatory as she had transgressed not only his honour, but hers as well. Her 'murder' is not so much an act of revenge as one of sacrifice- Othello is trustful. He trusts Iago absolutely and cannot believe that Desdemona and Cassio would betray him. Being unsure of his own position in an alien society, although he is 'seemingly accepted and rewarded' he is prone to jealousy and this destroys him. Once roused he refuses to listen to reason.

### Iago

He is considered the 'most heinous villain in Shakespeare.' Being the most inveterate liar, he inspires trust in others who associate with him- Rodrigo, Desdemona and Othello. To Othello Iago's trust turns deadly. He is absolutely without conscience. Even after the horrible consequences of his actions, he shows no guilt or pity. He refuses to talk, stonily turning blind eyes and deaf ears to the consequences of his actions. He is the very opposite of Othello in speech, being vulgar and bawdy. He is willing to take revenge from anyone and enjoys giving pain to others (sadistic). He kills his own wife (v ii 231-242). This is part of a greater sadism- his general hatred of women. (Some critics attribute this to a homosexual tendency.) This manipulative skills make him a powerful and compelling figure.

## **Desdemona**

Desdemona is seen very often as stereotypically weak and submissive. But her very first speech denies this: (I, iii 179-180). Desdemona tells her father boldly and unhesitatingly, “My noble father, I see here a divided duty.” Later, one sees this spiritedness and courage in Act iv/ 236. Her response after Othello strikes her; “I have not deserved this”. Her jests with Iago (bawdy and burdening on the sexual) reveal her as a normal, vital, young and sexual woman, recently married. She shows this feature again in Act iii, sc. Iii lines 61-84. When she coquettishly pleads with Othello to forgive Cassio. She is submissive at the end, takes responsibility for her murder.

Some critics see a contradiction in her actions and personality: self-efficiency / innocent and submissive / bold, independent/ self-effacing and withdrawing. The contradiction may spring from the conflict that assails her. Pressure is brought upon her to defend her choice to her father and later to defend her fidelity to the man to whom she justified her love. Her being smothered can be taken as symbolic- the suppression of her free spirit and will.

## **Emilia**

Earlier the submissive partner of Iago, the creature of his sadistic manipulations and lust turns and proves herself a woman of courage and integrity. She defends Desdemona like a lioness and reveals Iago’s villainy without any self-interest.

## **Bianca**

Contrasted with Emilia is a stereotypical fallen woman used by men for their lust and greed. However one sees a certain softness in her. She plays a significant role in the plot.

## **Cassio**

Othello’s second in command, has all the trimmings of an educated and cultured Venetian. However, he is weak in his disposition – easily swayed by stronger characters.

### **1.2.10 Setting**

The play starts in Venice and moves to Cyprus. At the time the Turks invade it. During the time of Shakespeare Venice was a prosperous Italian city (Early Modern Period). It was a symbol of law and civilization, a place of white supremacy, which makes Othello a black Moor, stand out.

In England Venice was known as a city where prostitutes roamed during Shakespeare's time. This may be significant because Othello calls Desdemona a whore. Is Othello expressing the general feeling of Shakespeare's time or showing contempt for the white incumbents of Venice? Or his ignorance of white culture – or contempt for it? Dramatic action moves to a military encampment in Cyprus – an island sacred to Venus – the goddess of love. It is away from civilization and rationality and everything goes wrong and Iago manipulates Othello's and Desdemona's destruction. At the military camp Desdemona has no support system. If she was back in Venice, she may have found such support. She is extremely vulnerable to the violence associated with men and the military.

### 1.2.11 Techniques

Shakespeare uses conventional dramatic devices as well as literary devices.

#### (i) Dramatic devices

(a) Dramatic irony (gap between the knowledge the audience has and the characters have). This is both situational and verbal – verbal irony is created when the characters say words which mean other than what they mean. Along with these, irony of fate too intervenes. Eg: the shipwrecks of the Turks – which leaves Othello, purposeless, divested of his military power.

#### (b) Soliloquy

Builds up dramatic tension to explain evil (in Iago and in humans).

Engages the audience.

Informs the audience.

Helps to analyze the difference between appearance and reality, helps to understand character. Eg: Iago.

(c) Juxtaposition – play begins with a courtroom scene ends too with a similar scene. Othello and Iago are set against each other as protagonist and antagonist.

**(ii) Literary devices**

(a) Metaphors

Eg: Barbary horse, garden, plants, darkness

(b) Symbols

Handkerchief	Othello's love
	Sign of infidelity
	Virginity and fidelity

(c) Imagery

Animals, hell, demons and monsters

(d) Foreshadowing

Brabantio predicts that Desdemona will betray Othello.

Desdemona's willow song predicts her death.

**1.2.12 Issues and Themes**

- Jealousy- analyses and discusses the nature of jealousy.
- Importance of honour and reputation.
- Ethnicity (skin colour).
- Loyalty and Treachery.
- The incompatibility of military heroism and love.
- Isolation.

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### 1.3 *The Tempest*

By William Shakespeare

#### 1.3.1 Socio-cultural back ground of the play

*The Tempest* is considered one of the last plays written by Shakespeare, and is believed to be written during 1610-1611. It was first performed at the Court by the *King's Men* and then subsequently performed again during the festivities to celebrate King James' daughter, Princess Elizabeth's wedding. It is believed that through this play Shakespeare bid farewell to his audiences and that he has used Prospero's character to voice some of his interior monologues. A very important context for the play is its use of newly discovered love of exploring the world and naval voyages. In the early 1600's several expeditions had taken place to the New World and England was on the brink of its massive colonial expansions. The abundance of travel literature, eyewitness records of William Strachey and Sylvester Jordain of the real life shipwrecks and other colonial exploits would have been familiar to Shakespearean audiences and thus the setting, of being shipwrecked and being stranded on the sea was a common theme. Other than the shipwreck, many critics and Shakespeare scholars believe that the play would have been influenced by the Montaigne's essay *Des Cannibales (Of the Cannibals)*, the tradition of romance and commedia dell'arte. While it may have been written to celebrate the Princess Elizabeth's marriage and as Shakespeare's farewell to the theatre, it gained popularity after the Restoration. While it was performed in adapted versions during that period, *The Tempest* was reintroduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with renewed critical interest in the play and its message, about colonialism/ post colonialism and feminism. Today it is considered as one of the best works of Shakespeare and has been adapted and performed in many forms and styles, including operas, paintings and songs.

#### 1.3.2 Introduction to the dramatist

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, dramatist and an actor widely recognized as one of the greatest writers in English. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and studied in the local grammar school till his marriage to Anne Hathaway at the age of 18. After the birth of his children, Shakespeare is believed to have fled his hometown to work in London

while some believe he was fleeing home to escape an unhappy marriage. Biographers and Shakespeare scholars suggest that as early as mid-1580's to 1592 Shakespeare would have begun his career as an actor and a playwright, writing against the established standards set by the educated 'university wits' comprising of Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe and Robert Greene. Initially his plays were performed by a group of players called *Lord Chamberlain's Men* which was owned by the players themselves and to which Shakespeare too belonged. They were a leading group of players during their time and King James I awarded them a royal patent during his reign. They changed their name to *King's Men* after that and owned both the newly established Globe Theatre and the Blackfriars indoor Theatre by 1608. Shakespeare is believed to have been a prolific writer, producing not only plays but sonnets, poems while being an actor as well. He is believed to have been the house playwright for *King's Men* till about 1613 and then is believed to have retired, due to Bubonic Plague affecting London and his family affairs. He died suddenly in 1616 and was survived by his wife and daughters. He was buried at the Holy Trinity church in Stratford-upon-Avon where he was baptized 52 years previously. His works have been reinterpreted and adapted over the ages, once again asserting his timeless versatility that enables even the modern audiences/ readers to find familiarity in his works.

### **1.3.3 Genre of the play**

*The Tempest*, which is a mix of tragicomedy and romance, is performed observing the three unities in the play, time, space and action, and is believed to be one of the greatest dramatic works of Shakespeare. The elements of political strife that led to the tragic experiences of Prospero and his daughter are tempered with the comedic characters of Stephano and Trinculo. The play reveals the treachery of Antonio and its subsequent impact on Prospero. It is woven around Prospero's desire to secure Miranda's future by ensuring her marriage to the son of King of Naples; Ferdinand. The play is also influenced by characteristics borrowed from commedia dell'arte, an Italian theatrical form in which improvised dialogues and stock characters that represent different types appear. This form of theatre first emerged in northern Italy in the fifteenth century with the carnival tradition and rapidly gained popularity throughout Europe. Shakespeare uses this form in *The Tempest* through characters such as Caliban, Ariel, Stephano and Gonzalo. Shakespeare also uses the masque as a technique to relieve the plain stage of its

drabness in Act IV. The drunken antics of Trinculo and Stephano together with Caliban serve as the antimasque that is a grotesque dance of comedic nature. While masque is a derivative of the festive dances of the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, antimasque is performed in between masques or before masques as a contrast to the grandeur of masque, by lesser or lower ranking characters in the play.

#### **1.3.4 Overview of the play**

The play opens with a violent storm striking the ship that is carrying Alonso, the King of Naples; Ferdinand, his son; Antonio, Prospero's brother; Sebastian, Alonso's brother; Gonzalo, Stephano and Trinculo. The ship is struck by lightning and the crew is shipwrecked in the storm.

The next scene begins with Prospero and Miranda on a calm sea shore looking at the shipwreck. The father-daughter duo have been stranded in this island for the last 12 years. When Miranda pleads with her father to save the people struck by the shipwreck, Prospero assures her that everything will be fine and proceeds to recount their past in Milan. Prospero was the Duke of Milan who was deposed from his rightful post by his usurping brother Antonio. Prospero and Miranda survive because of the kindness of Gonzalo, a nobleman in Milan, who helped them in secret by providing them with food and clothing, as well as Prospero's books.

Prospero charms Miranda to sleep at this point and summons Ariel, the comic sprite (or spirit) who orchestrated the shipwreck using his magic powers. Ariel was imprisoned by the former inhabitant witch of the island, Syrocax, and Prospero had set him free of his former bondage. Syrocax has died before Prospero's arrival in the island. Prospero had found Caliban, her son, a deformed monstrous non-spiritual inhabitant of the island. Prospero taught him language and religion and Caliban now uses the same language to curse Prospero for mistreating him.

Ariel entices the wandering Ferdinand to come towards Miranda and they fall in love. Miranda is smitten by Ferdinand, the only human she had ever seen besides her father and Caliban. In turn, Ferdinand is taken by her sweet temperament. Prospero pretends to be angry with the two lovers despite secretly being happy about Miranda's future prospects. He accuses Ferdinand of deceit and then imprisons him for being impudent. Ariel once again uses his magic

to create a rift between Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso, Gonzalo and other lesser lords. When everyone except Antonio and Sebastian falls asleep to Ariel's music, the conversation between Antonio and Sebastian reveals their wickedness and desire for power. But before they are able to kill the King, Ariel wakes Gonzalo up, and Sebastian and Antonio scramble for an excuse to explain their drawn swords.

Meanwhile, in another part of the island, Caliban meets the wandering Trinculo and Stephano. Through a series of comedic misinterpretations and mis-recognitions, which leads to an antimasque, Caliban's ignorance and Stephano's and Trinculo's absurdity are revealed. Ferdinand is put to work by Prospero and Miranda goes to keep him company and flirts with him. At the end, Miranda proposes and Ferdinand accepts. While this takes place, Prospero is on the stage, but unseen by the two lovers. He is pleased with this development.

Prospero uses the help of his magic and Ariel to create guilt in Alonso for supplanting Prospero with Sebastian and punishes the drunken and scheming Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo. Finally Prospero intervenes, once again using his magical powers, to save Alonso's life from Sebastian and Antonio. At the end, he brings Alonso and others to him through Ariel, reveals Antonio's treachery and confronts Alonso and Sebastian for aiding Antonio. After they are made to feel guilty about their sins, he tells them that he forgives them, and reveals Ferdinand's whereabouts as well. Finally everyone is relieved and Prospero is restored to his Dukedom and the Boatswains, believed to have been shipwrecked are also awakened from their deep sleep. Ariel is promised his freedom after he completes his final task of ensuring calm seas for the whole party, including Prospero and Miranda, to set sail the next day, for Milan. Finally, Prospero delivers his final speech in an epilogue, asking the audience to forgive him for his wrongdoing and set him free by applauding.

### **1.3.5 Structure and setting**

The play, unlike many other Shakespeare's plays, observes the unity of time, space and action throughout the plot. As Prospero says in the final act, the action in the play takes place in real time, with the action as well as the story taking place in nearly three hours. The stage is left bare for most of the play, as in most Shakespearean plays. The bare stage once again questions the

reality, the use of dramatic illusions and the nature of the play itself. While most of the elaborate activities on stage are either performed through magic or illusions, critics believe that this was Shakespeare's way of highlighting theatrical illusions as well as his farewell to the stage.

By setting the events in a remote unnamed island, and by making Milan and Italy the home of Prospero, Miranda and the shipwrecked travellers, Shakespeare deftly avoids any direct references to the English nobility or to the politics of London. This has been Shakespeare's strategy in most of his plays, thus avoiding any conflicts of interest with the audience or the sponsors, who were either the monarchs or the nobles.

### 1.3.6 Characterization

#### Prospero

Prospero is the main character and the protagonist of the play. The play unfolds through his narration of his history and his story. He was the Duke of Milan, deposed by a scheming brother and stranded on an island with his daughter, Miranda. He is an educated noble who is well versed in the arts of magic. He is thus able to command the spirit Ariel to do his bidding and is also capable of creating magical illusions with the aid of his servant, Ariel. Prospero's character is made up of a mix of the good and the bad. He is capable of brewing up storms to punish those who have harmed him while he is also capable of forgiving them for their sins. Prospero is also capable of being gentle with Ariel while being harsh towards Caliban. By creating a grey character that is both good and bad, Shakespeare creates a convincing human character through Prospero.

Prospero, a deposed ruler, can also be interpreted as a person *who (mis)uses* his power and love of magic to coerce others. On the one hand, he executes a fairly complicated plan of revenge on the inhabitants of the island. For instance, he is certainly wicked to Caliban, and imprisons Ariel. His gentleness towards Ariel can easily be seen in his strategy to control him through flattery. The way he captures the Island by overthrowing its dwellers relates to the theme of colonisation. On the other hand, Prospero, at a personal level, also seems to manipulate Miranda's feelings and emotions. He loves Miranda: yet, he subtly controls Miranda's feelings as part of his greater plan for revenge and to take back what is rightfully

his. Critics also suggest that Prospero's character, in his ability to command illusions and create magic, is similar to that of Shakespeare and his ability to create enticing plots. Prospero's final epilogue is read by many critics to be that of Shakespeare's goodbye to the stage as well.

### **Ariel**

Ariel is referred to as a 'spirit' that was confined to a tree by the original inhabitant of the island, the evil Sycorax. Prospero releases Ariel with the promise that if the sprite obeys Prospero's commands, he will release Ariel from bondage. Ariel represents the local inhabitant who is colonised, and then works together with the coloniser to achieve his own goals.

### **Caliban**

He is the original inhabitant of the island before Prospero's arrival in the island, the son of Sycorax. He is described as a monstrous, villainous creature who has no moral code or religion, in stark contrast with Prospero's civilised, learned ways. He is portrayed as having no language before Prospero taught him to speak. Prospero and Miranda teach him language and provide him with religion. In return, we see Caliban uses the same language to curse his benefactors.

In more recent interpretations of the play, Caliban is seen as the representative of the suppressed colonised subject who refuses to comply with the demands of the coloniser/ the outsider. He uses the same language he was taught to rebel and can be interpreted as a symbol of postcolonial resistance among the original inhabitants of the countries that were later colonised.

Caliban can also be read as a person who draws sympathy from audiences. For instance, Caliban's experiences are parallel to Prospero's in some ways: his Island is taken from him in the same way that Prospero's title is usurped. Caliban says: "This Island's mine, by Sycorax my mother/ Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first". Further, Caliban is treated as a slave by Prospero. Caliban is treated as a monster, a non-human, a fish and a black man: this can be read in line with the postcolonial line – considering islanders as 'demonic others', as inferior, negative, savage and evil. Caliban can also be seen as a person who is capable of poetry; he shows an awareness of, and affection for, the natural beauty of the island.

## **Sycorax**

This character never appears on the stage. Syrocax, Caliban's mother, is believed to be the original inhabitant of the island where Prospero and Miranda are living in exile. She was dead when Prospero arrived in the island and is talked of as an evil witch who was banished to the island while she was pregnant with her son, Caliban. It was Syrocax who imprisoned Ariel in a tree, who was then set free by Prospero. Therefore Syrocax is believed to be the foil, the anti-hero to Prospero's character. Like Caliban, she is also believed to be the representative figure of the oppressed people from colonisation in a postcolonial reading of *The Tempest*. In addition, she also represents the silenced and demonised voice of the female in patriarchal societies, within a feminist reading of *The Tempest*.

## **Miranda**

She is the only female character that appears in the play and is one of the main characters that have very little influence on the development of the play. Miranda is the daughter of Prospero, the deposed Duke of Milan and has never seen anyone in all her adult life except for her father and their native servant Caliban. She represents beauty, naiveté and innocence that are untouched by any of the evil machinations practiced by Antonio and Sebastian or scheming and revenge by her own father, Prospero. Miranda's character is criticised for her lethargy by the feminist critics and for her easy compliance and subtle exploitation of Caliban by modern critics who view her character as a stereotype of the colonial female in colonised locations. For instance, Caliban is accused of attempted rape of Miranda.

In sum, the characters have been created in the style of commedia dell'arte to represent the good and the bad. The illiterate 'natives' also contribute to the setting of the play. Since it was written and performed during the time of King James with allusions to colonisation, it was important to distinguish between the colonisers represented by Prospero and the local inhabitants represented by Syrocax and Caliban. The former is largely presented as rational, civilised and educated, while the latter are portrayed as savage, uncivilised and incapable of rational thought. The forgiving Prospero once again represents the educated classes that are noble and just, and clearly beyond petty vengeance while Sebastian and Antonio represent the ungrateful manipulators popular in political strife in various instances in English history.

### 1.3.7 Techniques

**One location** – One of the main techniques significant to this play is its observation of the unity of time, place and action. The whole play takes place in one geographic location, the island, and takes place in nearly three hours. As a Shakespearean play, this has a significant importance due to his nature of playing with time and place of his plays.

**Masque** – These are the musical interludes that add an element of extravagance and magic into the play. Critics also believe that using masques would have added more colour and stage presence to the otherwise bare stage that represented the island in which the action took place. Masques and antimasques also heightened the difference between the nobility and the gentility represented by Prospero, and Miranda and the uncouth represented by Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo.

**Use of isolated scenes** – The use of isolated scenes in the play highlighted the importance of each setting as well as the musicality of the play, which is like a compilation of different segments to make a complete piece. By using isolated scenes, the stage settings are also kept to a bare minimum, thus enabling the easy adaptability of the play to both indoor and outdoor theatres.

### 1.3.8 Issues and themes

**Colonised vs the coloniser** – One of the main thematic concerns of *The Tempest* as interpreted in modern times is the concern with colonisation and the interaction between the colonised local people and the coloniser represented by Caliban and Prospero respectively. Many postcolonial critics read the interaction between Caliban, Ariel and Prospero to be representative of the many layers of power and interaction between the colonised and the colonisers. *The Tempest* still has references to the explorations during the 1600's and Britain's burgeoning interest in colonial expansion through the voyages and the shipwreck.

#### **Legitimacy and birthright**

This is an important theme in the play. Prospero's right to dukedom and his brother's devious means of usurping him of his rightful ownership becomes the basis for the play and its many

developments. While stranded on the island, Antonio encourages Sebastian to kill Alonso, the rightful king, to become the next ruler. While the usurpers seem to enjoy power and its many benefits, the play highlights, through Prospero and the final triumph of truth about Antonio and Sebastian, the importance of legitimacy related to birthright, meaning a particular right of possession or privilege a person has from birth, especially as the eldest son (primogeniture- the state of being the firstborn child).

Legitimacy is also made into a contested topic through a postcolonial reading with reference to Prospero's use of Caliban and the ownership of the island. Since Syrocax was the first inhabitant before Prospero's arrival and since Caliban is the son of Syrocax, it is logical to deduce that Caliban is the legitimate owner/ ruler of the island. Despite such contentions, Prospero decides that Caliban is not educated or refined enough to possess or rule the island, therefore taking over the rule of the island. This leads to the question of legitimacy, since if rightful owners are to be restored, both Prospero and Caliban should be treated equally. Therefore, the treatment of

legitimacy, depending on the perspective through which it is being narrated is an interesting thematic element in the play.

### **Revenge**

Revenge is a significant theme. Prospero plans to avenge his usurping brother and regain his dukedom. He also uses his magic to create a storm and punish not only his brother, but also the complacent King and Sebastian as well. While revenge is portrayed as righteous and just in Prospero's case, the same revenge which Caliban plots against Prospero is portrayed as unjust and monstrous. Prospero redeems himself by forgiving the wrongdoers but it is unclear about Caliban's future, since he is unrepentant of his sins, especially against Miranda and Prospero.

### **Magic: the good and the bad**

Both the good and the dark forms of magic take centre stage in *The Tempest*. Prospero creates a lot of illusions, first to punish the wrongdoers and then to appease the young lovers. He also commands the spirits including Ariel and the play itself becomes an allegory for illusive make believe. Prospero's magic and his use of magic is portrayed as the beneficial kind which is

capable of educating people and helping people, not only to overcome their weaknesses, but also to come to terms with their dark characters. In contrast to that, Sycorax who was also practicing magic is referred to as the evil witch who had no compassion for the others. This aspect of the use of magic, both as good and dark forms, is contested in modern postcolonial readings of the play, because of its biases towards Prospero and his use of magic.

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## ***1.4 The Glass Menagerie***

**By Tennessee Williams**

### **1.4.1 Socio - cultural background of the play**

Premiered in Chicago in the USA in 1944 at the Civic Theatre *The Glass Menagerie* is set in St. Louis in Missouri in the USA in the 1930s. It is set against the backdrop of the Great Depression (1929-1939), pre-World War II contexts and America's involvement in the War. The Great Depression was excessive in terms of its impact on economies. It is considered the most severe economic collapse in the history of the Western industrialized world. The economic chaos caused panic and wiped out millions of investors while citizens experienced the aftermath of such socio-political and economic decline. These effects were heightened through material and psychological destruction caused by World Wars and America's involvement in it. The play presents the personal circumstances experienced by a family in St. Louis in America in this period, in the 1930s.

The play derives, as the playwright admits, from Williams' personal experiences growing up in St Louis in a tenement in the 1930s. It must also be noted here that "Tennessee Williams has often been accused of exorcising his family demons in his plays and of therefore sometimes cloaking events in a personal symbolism that is impossible for an audience to penetrate totally" ( Jacobus, 2001, 1097).

### **1.4.2 Introduction to the dramatist**

"Theatre poet in prose" is how Frank Durham describes Tennessee Williams.

Tennessee Williams was born in 1911 in Mississippi to a family where his father worked in a shoe company and his mother was a Southern belle (a woman of the American Deep South's upper socioeconomic class). Williams seems to have suffered through a difficult childhood due to his father's abusive parenting and mother's smothering nature. He was also shaken by his sister's emotional imbalance. As a young person, he despised his job at a shoe company and had a nervous breakdown in 1935.

Williams has admitted, in an interview with Dotson Rader in 1981 in North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, that he was a “born writer”. Referring to his childhood, especially to an illness experienced as a child, Williams has also recalled that his “mother encouraged [him] to be more of a shut-in than [he] needed to be”. He also has stated that his mother is more “psychotic than [his] sister Rose.” He recalls how he commenced writing: “I began to live an intensely imaginative life. And it persisted that way. That’s how I turned into a writer, I guess. By the age of twelve, I started writing”. In 1929, Although Williams enrolled in the University of Missouri, he had to be withdrawn. He started working in a show company; Williams explains that from the age of 11 until he left the university, he lead a “shy” life – bottling up all his feelings and suppressing his views. He describes his nervous past: “I supposed it was caused by an unconscious clash in me between my sexual drives and the puritanism imposed by my mother, and the great fear my father inspired in me. He was a terrifying man”.

However, after he graduated from the University of Iowa in 1938, Williams started to become a successful dramatist. When Rader asks how plays come in to his mind, Tennessee explainsthat “A play just seems to materialize; like an apparition, it gets clearer and clearer and clearer.” His views on homosexuality are not dealt with in his work; but confined to his personal life: “I never found it necessary to deal with it in my work. It was never a preoccupation of mine, except in my intimate, private life”. Talking about the play *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams exposes that the play is based on his best short story titled “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” which grew out of the intense emotions he felt seeing his sister’s psychological circumstances. It is believed that the play *The Glass Menagerie* is partly autobiographical.

Although the play, as noted, is set against the backdrop of the socio-political circumstances in America, it overtly is woven around a family. As the playwright admits it is a memory play, i.e. a main character narrates the events which are drawn from his or her memory. Just as the events of the play reflect a character’s expression, the play also refers to the mode of expressionism - a dominant literary movement originated in Germany in the period of World War I. It sees the world and people not as an objective reflection of reality but through the artist’s internal, subjective perspectives. Tennessee Williams admits that he was strongly influenced by Anton Chekov for his writing and by D.H. Lawrence for his identify in sexuality.

### **1.4.3 Overview of the play**

Set in the Wingfield apartment in St. Louis in Missouri in the USA, and round the Wingfield family, the play portrays four characters named Amanda, Tom, Laura, Jim and one unseen character, Mr. Wingfield (Tom and Laura's father and Amanda's husband) presented through the memory of Tom. When the play begins, Tom stands outside this apartment on a fire escape – a stairway used for escaping from a building on fire- and addresses the audience to see the play. Thus, the play is presented through Tom's memory. The audience then sees the family, Tom, his mother Amanda and his sister, Laura having dinner in the apartment. It becomes known that Tom is the bread-winner as the father has left the family many years ago: yet the father's portrait in the apartment represents his 'invisible presence' - the impact of his departure on family members. It shows that Tom is overpowered by his mother about table etiquette, smoking and so on. Amanda had enrolled Laura in college, although Laura dropped out due to her socio-psychological anxiety. Laura is engaged in caring for her glass menagerie, instead. Through Amanda's influence, Tom brings one of his college friends home, Jim. Amanda is overjoyed as he would be a gentleman caller for her 'crippled' daughter. However, her expectations are shattered at the end of the play while Tom leaves the family after an argument with his mother – a culmination of Tom's suppressed anxiety and tension.

### **1.4.4 Structure and setting**

*The Glass Menagerie* takes place in the Wingfield family's apartment in St. Louis in 1937 (In St. Louis, unemployment was extremely high mainly due to the Great Depression. The city had also expanded its industrial base during the World War). The setting is the living room of in their apartment. The events of the play through its seven scenes are framed by Tom's memory. The flashback techniques is used to reveal Tom's memory.

### **1.4.5 Characterisation**

#### **Amanda**

Amanda is once a Southern Belle: as noted, the term ‘Southern Belle’ is used to refer to women of the American Deep South’s upper socioeconomic class. She is the mother of Tom and Laura. Her husband has left her, leaving the responsibility of two children on her shoulders. She is obsessed with her memories as shown through her references to her gentlemen callers. She is also seen as a mother who is overly concerned about her children; she wants a good life for her children, but according to her whims and fancies. In attempting to do so, Amanda acts like a nagging mother to Tom, for instance. Put differently, Amanda seems a woman caught between her past nostalgic memories and her desire for a better future, in terms of socio-economic concerns, for the family – a better job for Tom and Gentlemen callers for Laura. Her desire is also influenced by the socio-economic background in the era. Her personality is also reflected through her way of treating Tom. For instance, she considers Tom both as a child and as a mature person who is supposed to take socio economic responsibility for the fatherless house. Amanda expects Tom to behave like a ‘Southern gentleman’ in all respects right down to table manners and gentleman callers for Laura. Both children seem disappointments to Amada: Tom is aloof and seems to resemble his father while Laura has no self-esteem for a future such as the one Amada conceives for her. Amanda’s attempt to find a good husband for Laura may subtly reflect her failure in the institute of marriage.

Although she is overbearing and controlling, she cares much about her children. Although her children are physically grown-up, she still considers Amada and Tom as ‘children’, reflecting relationships between parents and children in many Asian countries. For instance, marriages for grown-up children are often arranged by parents in Sri Lanka: marriages often occur not only through mutual consent of the partners, but also in consultation with their parents and extended families. Amanda’s attempt in finding a gentleman caller for Laura and her advice, although rejected by Tom, may invite audiences to empathise with Amanda. She may draw the audience’s sympathy.

#### **Tom**

Tom is the narrator of the story, as well as a character in it, and it is through his memories that the events are presented to the audience. Being the bread winner of the family in the fatherless

family and in his mother's care and the constraints of his job, Tom appears to be caught between his responsibilities at home. He seems to escape from this by going to movies and poetry. Yet, his attempt is restricted by his mother's demands. Tom's fluctuation between his desire for psychological and physical liberty and his attempts at escape results in chaos. Tom seems a creative and intellectual person as reflected through colleagues' reference to "Shakespeare". Tom may be interpreted as a cruel son to his mother, and a selfish brother as he left them alone forgetting his responsibilities. Yet, what is visible through his actions and unspoken thoughts are his psychological status – a young man caught between freedom and responsibilities on the home front, between restrictions in his job and stagnant life.

### **Laura**

Laura - a partially disabled delicate young girl - is Amanda's daughter and Tom's sister. She suffers from anxiety and is concerned about her physical disability. She prefers walking alone the streets in St. Louis to attending typing classes. She is also caught between her two struggles; it is due to her physical disability, her shyness and nervousness. She attempts to escape from her psychological imbalance through the glass menagerie.

### **Jim**

According to Tom, Jim was an outstanding success in high school, and everyone expected that he would succeed in life. Jim was a "star in basketball", the "captain of the debating club" and was "shooting with such velocity". However, Jim has found life much tougher than he might have expected, has ended up working at Tom's ware house: "holding a job that wasn't much better than mine [Tom's]". Descriptions also suggest that Jim is a cheerful, optimistic young man, amidst difficulties. Contrasted to Tom, Amada and Laura, Jim is not seen as a person who looks for escape from his current situation. Thus, Amanda assumes that he will be a good gentleman caller for Laura.

Jim's arrival leads to the play's climax. Although the brief encounter between Jim and Laura makes the scene romantic, Jim's departure from the Wingfield's family creates a 'tragic' end to the play. It is Jim's departure which shatters Amanda's expectations, and causes an argument between Tom and Amanda. Jim's departure indirectly leads to Tom's departure from home. Amanda and Laura are left to face reality and to continue living in their fantasy. Jim's character,

although initially introduced as a plain person who could be considered a ‘gentleman caller’ and who is seen as a nice person, negatively affects the family.

### **Mr. Wingfield**

Mr. Wingfield is physically absent in the play; yet his presence is represented through his portrait which sits in the apartment. He has worked for a telephone company and has abandoned his family several years before the action of the play. His departure can be attributed to the burden on Tom as the bread winner and the father-figure of the family. It is mainly because of Mr Wingfield’s departure that Tom has to be the ‘father’ of the family: Tom also has to take responsibilities in finding gentleman callers for Laura, paying electricity bills and so on. Amanda’s psychological status may also be linked to his departure. Amanda had to look after children being a single-parent to them. Moreover, Amanda’s realisation that Tom resembles his father makes her desperate. Mr. Wingfield’s impact on the family members is also shown theatrically as he is frequently referred to, or seen through the portrait, in the play.

### **1.4.6 Techniques**

The play is presented as a memory play. In a memory play, a lead character narrates the events of the play, which are drawn from the character’s memory. A memory play focuses on the past as narrated by the main character; usually, a memory play is a dramatic representation of the playwright’s life — or at least loosely based upon the playwright’s experiences; some memory plays involve narration throughout where as others begin with a recollection made by the narrator and then shifts into a play without an interrupting narrator (Wade Bradford, 2016). Thus, memory plays often reveal psychological constraints and status in the characters.

Music also supports the dramatists to reveal psychological status of characters. Music is used in different ways to enhance the effects of the play – for instances both as diegetic and extra-diegetic. Voices of the characters and the sounds made by the objects in the play are identified as diegetic. At times music is in the background: characters do not hear it but the audience does; extra-diegetic. For instance, symbolising Amanda’s role as a mother, “Ave Maria” is played softly in the background in scene four (‘Ave Maria’ highlights that “The Lord is with thee,

blessed are thou among women ...”). This is an instance of the use of an extra-diegetic music in the play.

**Symbols** are used throughout the play in line with the main themes. The explicit focus on the glass menagerie and the implicit focus on Mr. Wingfield’s portrait are two significant examples.

#### 1.4.7 Themes and Issues

##### **Destruction of the American Dream**

Bigsby explains that *The Glass Menagerie* is “no more a play of purely private emotions and concerns than Chekov’s *The Cherry Orchard*” because the Depression and War destroyed the American dream. This is shown when characters are “caught at a moment of change”- change in the “private world” and in the “public world”. The play is an “elegy of a lostinnocence” (1997, 35-36). For instance, Jim, although a promising student, ends up working at the same ware house where Tom works.

Another significant theme in the play is **escapism**, which, as the Oxford English Dictionary defines, is “the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy”. This is reflected in all the five characters including Mr. Wingfield. Amanda often lives in her past memories to escape the rigid socio-economically and culturally restricted life she spends without a husband, and with a partially disabled daughter. Tom who is not happy at his workplace and with his nagging mother at home tries to escape by going to movies and so on. Laura escapes her real life situation – physical disability and psychological imbalance reflected through her excessive shyness – through her collection of glass animals. Tom and Laura’s father, and Amada’s husband has left the responsibilities of a husband and father, by being totally absent from family circumstances, by being a distant man. What needs to be investigated here is the degree to which each character is escapist and the relative success or failure in their efforts of escapism.

**Memory** also plays an important role in the play. As Tom announces the audience, the play is memory: the play is a memory of the past. The play highlights how the past distracts and haunts almost all the characters. For instance, Amanda often refers to her seventeen gentlemen callers

while Laura is haunted by her memories of her crush on Jim. Hence, the play shows the significance of memory.

The play is also about **emptiness in life** as stated by Benjamin Nelson:

The underlying belief in *The Glass Menagerie* is that there is very little, if any, reason for living. Man is by nature incomplete because his universe is fragmented. There is nothing to be done about this condition because nothing can be done about it. Human guilt becomes a corollary of universal guilt and man's life is an atonement for the human condition. In each character in *The Glass Menagerie* there is a part "like a missing wall or a room left unfurnished and he tries as well as he can to make up for it" (2001, 1133).

People's **inability to cope with dilemmas** is also a concern in the play. As Benjamin Nelson puts it: "...Williams has created genuine people in an intensely genuine situation, but they lack the completeness to truly cope with their dilemma" (2001, 1133). This comment is evident as the audience can sympathise with almost all the characters in the play.

**The role of physical and psychological illnesses** can also be considered as a significant concern in the play. This is presented primarily through Laura's character: her own psyche in relation to her physical disability can be discussed here. Amanda's concern and attitude towards Laura can also be incorporated into the discussion.

The play also shows the **impact of alcoholism, parental duties and responsibilities of siblings** as key issues in the play.

*The Glass Menagerie* can also be read as a play which portrays **the significant role in literature and art**. This is explicit through Tom's interest in literature, poetry and Shakespeare's works, for instance.

**Freedom and confinement** are also issues focussed in the play. For instance, while Mr Wingfield can be seen as a person who has ‘achieved’ freedom, Amanda, Laura and Tom are confined to family and socio-cultural obligations and restrictions.

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## 1.5 The Dumb Waiter

By Harold Pinter

### 1.5.1 Introduction to the dramatist and the genre

The 2005 Nobel Laureate for Literature Harold Pinter (1930-2008) - British Dramatist - was born in Hackney, the East End of London, to a working class Jewish family who were a part of a movement of Jewish emigration to the UK from Portugal. While being raised in Hackney during the War, Harold Pinter was subjected to several consequences of war such as evacuation, arrests, fine and incarceration. Yet, later he became a pioneering contributor to the Theatre of the Absurd.

### 1.5.2 The Theatre of the Absurd

Hungarian-born English dramatist Martin Esslin (1918-2002) coined the term in his 1961 book titled *The Theatre of the Absurd* and initially identified a few dramatists such as Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, and Harold Pinter as the major dramatists of the School of the Absurd.

The term absurd and absurdity suggests slightly diverse meanings. As an introduction to the Theatre of the Absurd, it is useful to explore the meaning of the word 'absurd'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, absurd means 'wildly unreasonable, illogical, inappropriate or ridiculous': it is also defined as arousing amusement or derision. The Cambridge dictionary defines the word absurd as 'stupid and unreasonable, or silly in a humorous way'. 'Having no rational or orderly relationship to human life' is a definition given in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. All these definitions seem relevant to introduce the Theatre of the Absurd. However, Ionesco's definition seems the most appropriate when discussing and analysing the term absurd.: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions becomes senseless, absurd, useless..." – (as quoted in Esslin, 1960, 671).

To refer to the emergence of the genre, it is assumed that socio-political upheaval and the rise of scientific knowledge and inquiry caused the origin of the Theatre of the Absurd. Esslin describes that such dramatists':

contention is that life in our age has lost any such readily identifiable rationale, that reality itself has become multidimensional and problematical. What, they ask in fact, is reality? What is verifiable? What is the meaning of existence? Can language itself be still used to communicate between human beings? Is there such a thing as character, personality, individuality? (1960, 673).

To list a few reasons for the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd:

- World Wars, especially World War II was a catalyst of Absurd theatre, especially the consequences of wars.
- Totalitarianism and weapons of mass destruction used in political struggles Albert Camu and his concepts of the human condition.

e.g. In his 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus defines the human condition as basically meaningless. Camus argues that humanity has to resign itself to recognizing that a fully-satisfying rational explanation of the universe is beyond its reach, and therefore, the world must ultimately be seen as absurd

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- The decline of religious faith during this period.
  - The sense of a loss of control over “rational human development” and the lack of a belief in “automatic progress” of society (Esslin, 1968, 6).
  - Influence of Darwin’s theories on the evolution of man (human beings).
  - Understanding the world as an incomprehensible place (Esslin, 1968, 5).
  - The audience is unable to ever understand the full meaning of the events, or understand the characters (Esslin, 1968, 5).
  - Distrust of language as a means of communication.
  - The dialogue can sometimes appear to counter what is happening onstage, for

example characters can start reciting lists, or repeating themselves over and over, using stereotypes and clichés over and over (Esslin, 1968, 3).

- Condition about the human psyche- e.g S. Freud's concepts related to 'power' of sex.
- Desperate experiences of human being's power – e.g. Destruction of Titanic, War casualties, death

The Theatre of the Absurd seems to question the nature of human existence or to explore the meaningless of life, and to present “a world without logic or morals, and without the using conventional dramatic language, plot and narrative’ (Roudane, 2009, 499). These dramatists represent the absurdity of human existence in a meaningless universe by bizarre or fantastic means. Thus, the following characteristics were common in many dramas which belong to the Theatre of the Absurd.

In many Absurd dramas, there is no clear-cut plot or story and the development of the structure is also not linear but circular. There are not recognizable human beings in the plays. In other words, characters lack consistency and change their personality not by logical development but arbitrarily. Esslin writes that:

“[h]aving renounced the function of telling a story, of exploring character, of discussing ideas, of solving problems, [the Theatre of the Absurd] has been able to concentrate on the presentation of what is essentially *a sense of being*, an intuition of the tragicomic absurdity and mystery of human existence.” (1970, p.19).

Dialogues in Absurd plays are often meaningless. This is evident through many repetitions silences and pauses in communication. One of the significant common motifs of the theatre of the Absurd is the ‘waiting feature’. The time period is vague: plays start without any formal exposition and end also without any exposition. Many symbols used, such as dustbins as living places, a dumb waiter as a messenger, often connote absurdity. “The absurdists have further demonstrated the theatre’s ability to deal not only with external reality in providing a concrete

and photographically correct reconstruction of real life but also, and much more interestingly, with the vast field of *internal reality* — the fantasies, dreams, hallucinations, secret longings, and fears of mankind.” (Esslin, 1970,223).

### 1.5.3 Pinteresque features

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word Pinteresque, as “resembling or characteristic of his plays”. Pinter’s plays are typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses. Given below is a list of common features in Pinter’s plays.

- Violence – especially latent violence
- Frequent Mysteries
- Threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language
- Peace as an illusion
- Unclear distinction between what is true and what is false
- Long pauses and silences
- Inability in communication
- Hackney and its influence (Exploitation and victimization encountered by Jewish)- e.g. German air raids over London
- Unsafety in one’s territory
- Darkness lying around the corner

The following statement by Pinter summarizes to a great extent a major concern in his plays, including *The Dumb Waiter*.

“The desire for verification is understandable, but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false...can it be both true and false”(1962 , Bristol University)

#### **1.5.4 Overview of the play**

*The Dumb Waiter* is a one-act play which was written in 1957 and premiered at the Hampstead Theatre Club, London, in 1960. The play takes place in a basement room with two beds against the back wall and a closed dumb waiter serving between them (a dumb waiter is a small device used to move things, usually food, from one level of a building to another). There are two doors: a door to the kitchen and lavatory is stage left, and a door to a passage, right. The play is structured around the encounter between two would-be hired murderers named Ben and Gus, on the night of a new assignment: apparently, they do not know who their victim is, yet they seem to be waiting for their next task. While Ben and Gus await their ‘order’, Ben lies on the bed left reading a newspaper: Gus either sits on the other bed tying his shoelaces, or he frequently goes towards the lavatory. Ben and Gus engage in debating on ‘seemingly odd and absurd’ topics, triggered from the newspaper. They also experience some ‘mysterious’ happenings such as the appearance of matches in a blank envelope under the door of their basement room and some random food orders from the dumb waiter. Their unseen ‘employer’ Wilson seems to be sending instructions through a speaking tube. In the final scene, when Gus leaves the room to have a glass of water (through the door, left), the speaking tube whistles and Ben listens to it. He hangs up and calls for Gus who is not on the stage then. The door to the passage (the door, right) opens sharply. Ben levels his gun at the door and Gus stumbles in, vulnerably stripped of some of his clothes and his gun. He looks up at Ben, and they stare at each other through a long silence. The consequent obvious is the latent menace, as frequently characterised in many Pinteresque plays.

#### **1.5.5 Structure and setting**

As noted, all the actions happen in this one act play in a small basement room, on a night. The play is structured around Ben and Gus – two hired murderers, and their invisible ‘employer’ named Wilson.

### 1.5.6. Characterisation

There are two characters named Ben and Gus who appear on the stage, and one invisible character, Wilson, who is never seen or heard by the audience. Ben and Gus are criminals with loaded revolvers awaiting instructions for their next assignment from the invisible character named Wilson, who seems to be Gus and Ben's 'employer/boss'.

While Ben sounds cold and calculating about their past jobs, Gus seems to display repentance about their latest victim. Ben seems to be the 'leader' of the two as he often ignores Gus's comments and questions of his partner. When Gus speaks something emotional, the conversation is often disconnected by Ben. Gus is often presented as a vulnerable character. For instance, throughout the play, Ben is reading the paper as an attempt to ignore Gus. It is Ben who has several exchanges with someone up the hatch. Ben seems to take orders as they come without question: Ben once grabs the speaking tube when Gus answers it. All these suggest Ben's power over Gus. The ending of the play with Gus facing Ben's gun without physical resistance, also implies that, Gus will do nothing to stop, or fight Ben.

Wilson who never appears on the stage seems very powerful because both Gus and Ben act according to his orders. His verbal orders are also not known to the audience and apparently to Gus. His physical absence and latent violence add menace to the play. The following list of symbols can be read to understand the characters.

- The dumb waiter
- The speaking tube
- The basement room
- The lavatory (flushes)
- The envelope
- Tying Shoelaces
- Language: communication (e.g about lighting the kettle/gas etc )

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## 1.6 *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*

By Athol Fugard

(co-authored by John Kani and Winston Ntshona)

### 1.6.1 Socio-political background of the play

The socio-political context of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* refers to the Apartheid era in South Africa in the 1970s. Apartheid, a system of racial segregation enforced by the South African government from 1948-1994, is a social policy of racial segregation involving political legal and economic discrimination and injustice against non-Whites, especially Black citizens. Racial segregation was practised in South Africa even in the periods of European colonisation; however, apartheid as a policy was gradually and rigidly enforced by the South African government named the National Party (NP), after gaining its power in 1948. Put differently, irrespective of the country's independence from Western colonisation, racial segregation was an avowal of the National Party rulers' racism, exercised through Acts. It resulted in Influx Control - the rigid limitation and control imposed upon the movement of black people into urban areas through segregation regulations.

In this regard, three Acts, the Population Registration Act (1950), the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Pass Law Act (1952) imposed by the NP are significant because the play alludes to them. The Population Registration Act (1950) categorised all citizens as Whites, Coloured, Black (Bantu) and others. The Group Areas Act (1950) mainly concerns the control over the ownership and occupation of land and buildings in South Africa. Accordingly, Black people were confined either to homelands or townships: that is, ten homelands, also known as Bantustans, were reserved in the rural areas in South Africa for black citizens, and urban *underprivileged* living areas called townships were built on the periphery of towns for the non-white persons. Through this Act, many of the Blacks in South Africa were removed from the urban areas such as Johannesburg regions, and were restricted to homelands. Unlike in urban areas, in homelands the life style is difficult for black people mainly because they had no job opportunities in homelands. King Williams' Town is a homeland whereas New Brighton is a segregated township for non-Whites: two localities stated in the play.

The Pass Law Act (1952) made it compulsory for all its black citizens to carry a passbook at all times. Similar to a passport, this document contained all the details on the bearer such as his/her name and the address, a photograph, fingerprints, and so on. It also documented the permission requested, denied and granted to any bearer to be in a certain region or to look for employment. The lack of such a passbook (with a valid entry or work permit), which specifies the region the citizen could reside in, would give the officials the right to arrest and imprison the citizen. Moreover, common facilities such as schools, public transport, beaches and hospitals were segregated and any non-White breaking such segregation regulations were rigidly penalised and incarcerated.

Evidently, the common aim of the *Group Areas Act* (1950) and the *Pass Law Act* (1952) was to exclude non-whites from living in the developed areas in the country, which were reserved for white settlers in South Africa. Moreover, political representation for the black population of South Africa was also abolished in 1970; consequently they lost their rights of national citizenship. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* predominantly represents the Pass Law Act and the *Group Areas Act* while alluding to apartheid regulations in general.

### **1.6.2. Introduction to the dramatist and genre**

Athol Fugard is a South African dramatist – a playwright, director and actor of about 30 plays – who writes in English. It is stated that the play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, is produced with the contribution of the two black actors at workshops, John Kani and Winston Ntshona. Born in Middleburg, Eastern Cape, South Africa in 1932, Fugard was brought by his English-speaking Irish/Polish father and Afrikaner mother to Port Elizabeth in South Africa. Although he studied at the University of Cape Town in Western Cape, Fugard dropped out because of his employment as a seaman on a steamer ship.

It was in 1956 that he returned to Port Elizabeth and married Sheila Meiring, a theatre colleague. The couple founded a theatre group called Circle Players and contributed to *Klaas and the Devil* (1956) which is considered to be Fugard's first script. His experiences later in Johannesburg as a clerk at the Native Commissioners' Court, where many black citizens were charged with violations of Apartheid Polices, gave opportunities for him to directly witness the injustice of such policies. He contributed in many aspects to the National Theatre Organisation

(NTO) sponsored by the government; Fugard produced, along with a black actor, Zakes Mokae *The Blood Knot* (1961) – which was later revised as *Blood Knot* (1987), which explored and criticized segregation policies and earned much international recognition. The initial reaction of the NP was to withdraw Fugard's Passport for four years.

Later on, with his black theatre colleagues, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, he founded the theatre group named Serpent Players. With a minimal set, performing in black townships, and predominantly following Brechtian theatrical principles of social critique, the group performed several plays which in many ways explored the nuances of apartheid policies and injustice. Due to apartheid restrictions in South Africa, the theatre production of Serpent Players was often premiered in fringe areas in South Africa, in Royal Court Theatre in London and in New York. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) was a production of the Serpent Players developed collectively through workshops among Fugard, Kani and Ntshona. It must be noted here that the play-text published by the Oxford University Press ascribes Fugard as the single author.

With his family, Fugard now lives in California working as a Professor in playwriting, acting and directing in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of California. He has earned many awards including the Tony Award and remains one of the most prolific dramatists. Fugard is best known for his criticism about injustice on black citizens in South Africa.

### **1.6.3 Overview of the play**

The opening scene of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is set in a photography studio owned by a black man named Styles in New Brighton, a township of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He first appears reading a newspaper to the audience. A newspaper headline about a car plant expansion triggers the narration of a previous incident at the Ford Factory where Styles worked before independently setting up the photography studio. Styles' long, one-sided monologue is interrupted when a customer arrives to have his photo taken to be sent to his wife living in King William's Town, in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. (The monologue lasts about 25 minutes in performance and comprises 15 pages in the play-text with the audience). Although the customer is Sizwe Bansi (it is revealed later in the play), he tells Styles that his name is Robert Zwelinzima.

Styles gives instructions to pose elegantly for photographs and explains the importance of photographs for Black citizens as they were deprived in reality of many opportunities. When Sizwe poses for the picture to be taken, the moment becomes frozen and Sizwe starts reading the letter written to his wife, to be sent with the photo. In the letter, he tells his wife that “Sizwe Bansi is dead”.

While he reads out the letter, Sizwe’s story is revealed through improvisation. Sizwe has left his wife in order to search for a job and a better life for his family in New Brighton. Yet his efforts in finding some employment in Port Elizabeth have become unsuccessful because he does not have a valid entry and a work permit. Officers have asked him to leave the region within three days. At which point he has gone to stay with a friend named Buntu. The scene then shifts to Buntu’s house, where Sizwe explains his unfortunate predicament emerged due to poverty and racial segregation in the country. Sizwe rejects the idea to work in a mine as it is too dangerous and risky. Buntu decides to take Sizwe out to a local bar. After leaving the bar, Buntu and Sizwe accidentally notice a corpse in a street – a man’s dead body. The passbook with the photograph next to the dead body proves that the dead person is Robert Zwelinzima. Buntu suggests a unique solution to Sizwe’s passbook problem with Robert’s passbook. Although initially Sizwe rejects Buntu’s suggestions, later, Sizwe accepts with reluctance to give up his identity and assumes a dead man’s name. Sizwe’s failure to find a work permit, coupled with Buntu’s argument, forces him to accept the identity of the dead, reluctantly. That is how Sizwe Bansi appears as Robert Zwelinzima – the dead man’s name – in Styles’ studio. Overall, the play represents the dystopian apartheid system in South Africa.

#### **1.6.4 Structure and setting**

Set in 1972 in New Brighton in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* presents three South African Black citizens as characters, Styles, Sizwe Bansi and Buntu played by two actors. Yet, the play focuses on the story of Styles and Sizwe. Although four locations are dramatized in the play (Styles’ photography studio, Buntu’s house, the local bar and the street of New Brighton outside the bar) in reality, the entire play is located in Styles’s studio. Other settings are played through improvisation, a dramatic technique which refers to actions and performances created spontaneously or without preparation. The structure is not rigid in this one-act play.

The play, as noted, opens with Styles' long monologue. He directly speaks to the real audience while reading a newspaper aloud. Styles monologue reveals the pathetic life style at the factory; yet the way he presents it to the audience and the way he mimics his white boss and his experiences at the Ford factory create humour. His monologue lasts until Sizwe comes to the studio to have his photograph taken to be sent to his family.

The monologue transforms to a dialogue between Styles and Sizwe which reveals Styles' talents and shrewdness as a photographer, why photographs are useful for people like Sizwe and so on. Then the story is developed through Sizwe's memory; he takes the narrative of the story revealing his history and how he relinquished his passbook and took the identity of a dead man. The narrative concludes by returning to the studio. The narration is shifted to a third person narrative including both men, Styles and Sizwe. While Sizwe narrates the dialogue with Buntu, Styles plays the role of Buntu.

The climax of the play is presented in Sizwe's flashback references with his dialogue with Buntu in the street outside the bar. How they accidentally see the corpse and how they exchange his photograph with the dead man lead Sizwe to question the necessity and validity of a passbook for many black citizens who do not understand the details given in it. The questions are raised from the audience as well, expecting the audience to be critical of the Passbook law and injustice experienced due to such laws. Although the play creates much humour, it depicts the tragic lifestyles of black people and explores the issues and injustice related to apartheid, especially in relation to passbooks.

In brief, the action of the play takes place in four localities in New Brighton in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in 1972. First, it is the Styles's photography studio which is situated near a funeral parlour, where Sizwe Bansi appears to have his picture taken. Then, through flashback and improvisation, the scene is shifted to Buntu's house and a nearby bar, where Sizwe stays when he has nowhere else to go in Port Elizabeth as he has been asked to leave the place in three days. The final and most crucial setting is one of the streets of New Brighton, outside the local bar. This is where they discover the dead body of Robert Zwelinzima. All these settings depict and highlight the fact that these characters inhabit a certain part of South African society, which put them in the dehumanising contexts of apartheid segregation.

### **1.6.5 Characterisation**

As noted, there are three main characters although they are played by two actors; Styles, Sizwe Bansi and Buntu. There is also a fourth unseen character, Robert Zwelinzima, although only his dead body is seen on stage. Styles plays both the role of Styles and the role of Buntu when Sizwe presents his story through improvisation. Robert does not appear as a live character; he is a dead body. The narratives of all three reveal the nuances of the dehumanizing aspects of the apartheid segregation and related tragic circumstances in South Africa.

#### **Sizwe Bansi**

The protagonist of the play, Sizwe Bansi (Sizwe meaning ‘nation’ and Bansi meaning ‘large’ in Bantu) has a wife and four children in King William’s Town. He has come to Port Elizabeth to look for work. His request for an official permit is denied: the stamp on his passbook issued by the National Party refuses to grant him a work permit. The government authorities have ordered him to leave Port Elizabeth and return to his hometown of King William’s Town where there are no work opportunities. Although condemned by his government to a life of poverty, he is compelled to stay in Port Elizabeth to find work. Thus, Sizwe accepts the passbook of the dead man, Robert. He takes the dead man’s identity in order for his survival and the survival of his family. This government decision would probably have resulted in the starvation and the demise of Sizwe and his family, if not for Buntu’s strategy. The notion that Sizwe is dead may however suggest the demise of the great South African nation due to the NP of the Afrikaner ruler.

#### **Styles**

Styles is the owner of the photography studio. He lives in Port Elizabeth, South Africa working independently at the studio. He reveals in his monologue to the audience that he used to work at the Ford Motor Company. He shares his memories at the company with the audience. Styles is a talented ‘businessman’, because he is able to persuade his customers to pose for photographs, attracting his customers. Through his photography, Styles contributes to preserve the faces and identities of black people who are marginalised in society and are forgotten by the rest of the world. Styles is able to run his own studio successfully. His story reveals the dehumanizing treatment of black workers at the factory. His imitation of the boss of the factory

satirizes the white employer. His narration also alludes to the environmental changes in South Africa in the 1970s.

### **Buntu**

Buntu, a friend of Sizwe who provides accommodation for Sizwe, can be considered the mastermind of the plan to find a way to get a job for Sizwe. He proposes Sizwe to exchange Sizwe's passbook with that of Robert's. Hence, Buntu is very influential as he is able to persuade Sizwe, with logic, to accept Robert's identity.

### **Robert Zwelinzima**

He is not alive in the play, yet his 'ghost' which gives life to the metaphorical death of Sizwe is a significant invisible character. His death also represents some tragic aspects of the society. In the play, it is revealed that Tsotsis have killed him. This term, tsotsis, refers to township gangs in South Africa. The issue of tsotsi is not explored in this play, yet, it is demonstrated in Gavin Hood's (2005) film adaptation based on Fugard's novel titled Tsotsi.

### **1.6.6 Techniques**

Unlike many dramas which are narrated in a linear fashion, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is non-linear, employing flashbacks and a stream of consciousness to narrate events. The play is presented through improvisation in theatre. As noted, improvisation is a dramatic technique which refers to actions that are created spontaneously or without preparation. Two different monologues are used to reveal both Styles' and Sizwe's stories. Styles talks to the audience directly while reading a newspaper headlines. Sizwe reveals his past when he reads out a letter written to his wife, which also serves as a monologue. Both these monologues are not merely humorous, but also convey the tragic experiences of the characters.

Bertolt Brecht's dramatic tradition and techniques are also used in the play. For instance, the removal of the fourth wall (the imaginary wall between the actors and audience which keeps them as observers) is used in the play. For instance, throughout Styles' monologue, he narrates the event at the Ford factory to the audience, by addressing them directly.

Devices of *Verfremdungseffekt* or V-effekt (commonly known as alienation effect) are employed in the play. They are often used to ‘make the familiar strange’ in order to provoke a social-critical audience response. For instance, everyone in South Africa during the period of Apartheid are familiar with passbooks: Yet, Sizwe encourages the audience to question its usefulness and exposes how it restricts Black people’s liberty. By referring to his passbook, Sizwe tells Buntu, “Take this book and read it carefully, friend, and tell me what it says about me. Buntu, does that book tell you that I’m a man?” Then, by studying the two books (Sizwe and Robert’s passbooks), Sizwe turns back to the audiences and asks:

“That bloody book...! People, do you know? No? Wherever you go... it’s that bloody book. You go to school, it goes too. Go to work, it goes too. Go to church and pray and sing lovely hymns, it sits there with you. Go to hospital to die, it lies there too!

The play also employs some features of “physical theatre” - a form of theatre which emphasises the use of physical movement, such as dance and mime, for expression. How Styles mimes the owner of the Ford factory and how Sizwe improvises the scene on the street are just two examples. What is also interesting to note is that Sizwe is unnamed when he appears in the studio; he is presented in the play-text as ‘man’. Except in the dialogues between Buntu and Sizwe enacted through improvisation, Sizwe is not identified by his name. This highlights his loss of identity.

### **1.6.7 Themes and Issues**

#### **The Injustices of apartheid**

The play problematises the injustices meted out to black people in South Africa under Apartheid, as an overall theme. Thus, it can be read as a critique of Apartheid policies and laws, especially of the Passbook Law.

#### **Identity**

Identity is one of the major themes in the play. It shows how a man is ready to renounce his true identity and assume that of a dead man in order to escape the injustices of Apartheid. Sizwe gives up his black identity and assumes that of Robert in order to find employment in Port

Elizabeth. Viewed more generally, it shows human beings' struggle to assert their identity amidst obstacles created by oppressive socio-political forces.

**The dehumanizing of black people** is also explored in the play. Sizwe is essentially compelled to destroy his own identity in order to preserve his life and the life of his family. Hence, Sizwe's history represents the ghost-like existence of the black citizens of South Africa, who were made invisible under Apartheid laws: The erasure of his identity parallels the erasure of black identities under this regime. They are forced to give up their humanity and dignity for their mere existence. The play problematizes whether a passbook with a work permit is more important than human dignity.

### **Significance of the present**

The significance of the present is also a theme in the play. Within the tragic circumstances of racial segregation, Styles, Sizwe, and Buntu seem to realize that they should live in the present forgetting their future. The only legacy they have to leave behind is the memory of their lives, so they strive to be the best men they can be and live the best lives they can.

### **Influence of liquor**

It is also possible to see the influences of liquor on people. It is after being drunk that they exchange the photos on the passbooks. Moreover, it is also at the bar that Sizwe expresses openly and bravely, in front of a member of the Advisory Board, that "Ciskeian Independence is shit": it can be considered as a criticism levelled against Ciskeian Independence (Ciskeian independence refers to a nominally independent state given to Bantustans).

### **Significance of photographs**

The play shows the significance of photographs, especially for the marginalised people, who have been erased in history. What is also shown through the play is that in addition to the significance revealed by Styles, photographs are also especially useful for black people for their survival.

### **Courage and independence**

The play can also be considered as a narrative of courage and independence in people. Styles has left the oppression at the factory and started an independent employment. He seems a successful businessman earning his living though his tactics, by winning the heart of the customers.

### **Friendship and humanity**

The play is also an account of friendship and humanity. This is shown through Buntu's friendship and companionship offered to Sizwe. Bantu offers not only the materialistic support to Sizwe but also moral support and a strategy (temporarily) for his survival.

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# Novel

## 2. 1 Introduction to the Novel

### 2.1 1. Development of the novel

The **novel** is a long fictional prose narrative which is distinguished from the **novella**, a prose text that is longer than a short story but shorter than the average novel. The terms **novel** and **novella** are both derived from the Italian word *novella*, which is derived from the Latin **novella narratiō**, meaning a “new kind of story”. The novella originally referred specifically to Italian and French tales written between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries such as the short tales in *The Decameron* (1348-53) by Boccaccio and *The Heptameron* (1548) by Marguerite de Navarre. Their length ranged from approximately 300 words to 50 pages.

Traditional novellas encompass a **frame story**, which illustrates how the various stories are narrated. The frame story is the ‘larger’ story within which the smaller stories are contained. The best example would be how Jataka tales are narrated. They begin with a story that requires the story teller to narrate another tale to compliment what they are narrating thus making the first story the ‘frame story’. They had a strong influence on narrative poetry, on drama and on the development of the novel. The frame story showed how different but related stories could be made into one larger but nonetheless coherent structure.

The modern novel was also influenced by the **memoir** which was largely or entirely fictitious, appearing to be true autobiographical history, often including diaries and journals.

One of the first books that employed the modern characteristics of the novel is, a long story completely made up by the author and not borrowed from history or older tales, named *Don Quixote*, by the Spanish author Cervantes. This was written at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Although works like *Don Quixote* lack the sustained focus on characterization found in later novels, their role in the development of the novel is undeniable, particularly in the systematic way in which it examines a specific theme or a problem.

Long prose fiction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the precursor to the modern novel. Daniel Defoe is the first English novelist who mastered the **memoir** with *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). These two works are largely episodic in structure, and written in the form

of journal entries, which made the characters and the circumstances authentic for the readers, by the virtue of the authorial insistence that they are true.

Another influence on the modern novel is the **epistolary Novel**, a story written in the form of letters, or letters with journals, usually presented by an anonymous author masquerading as the editor. *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1678) written entirely in epistolary form is a translation from French. *Pamela* (1741) by Samuel Richardson, who mastered the form, focused on motivation and character development rather than the plot which is significant in later novels. Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) were of the picaresque tradition (discussed below) in which he blended the best features of the novels of Richardson and Defoe. They were tales of adventure in which the characters were developed sensitively and sympathetically. It is generally accepted that Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, the main novelists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, established the English novel as a genre.

The period between 1750 and 1900 is noted for a significant growth in literacy and, along with this, a considerable increase in the publication of novels. While all the novels published were not of the same reputation or of the same literary calibre as that of Defoe's and Fielding's (there were serialised literature such as Penny Dreadfuls, that churned out sensational novellas with very little consideration for aesthetic or literary value) , it is important to note that the rise of the novel went parallel with the rise in literacy, industrialisation and emerging middle class. Another significant feature of this period was the emergence of women novelists. The literary profession had been almost exclusively male dominated. Some famous women novelists feared that their work would not be taken seriously and hence even assumed masculine pen-names.

**The Picaresque novel** is another novel form that emerged during the period 1750 -1800. It deals realistically with the adventures of a 'rogue' (Picaresque is a genre of a novel that relates the story in an episodic manner with a rough, adventurous and mostly dishonest yet appealing hero) who always escapes from precarious situations. Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) was instrumental in developing this novel form.

Some of the novelists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are among the most famous in English literature. One of them, Jane Austen, wrote at the beginning of the century. She documented her society and its quintessential values that marked the society and its social structures uniquely British. Quite

different were the historic novels of Sir Walter Scott, such as *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Red Gauntlet* (1824) which combined history, romance, and adventure.

The **Bildungsroman** is another type of novel that relates the psychological or sometimes the spiritual development of an individual from childhood to maturity. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) is an example. The **sentimental novel** and the **Gothic novel** are two genres of the novel that developed during the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Laurence Sterne's work exemplifies the former and Horace Walpole's the latter.

The late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century writers highlighted imagination and feeling over logical thought. Mary Shelly developed the Gothic novel further in *Frankenstein* (1818). Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) subtly parodies the Gothic. Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* also employs gothic features (1847).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is considered the age of the **realistic novel**. Realism began as a movement in art and sculpture and was later appropriated into other forms of art. The realistic novelists, who developed their craft through a pan-European exposure, aimed at creating believable, plausible stories. They depict ordinary characters, situations and settings. Features of realism are found in the works of writers such as Honoré de Balzac, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Henry James. Realistic novels also created a canon of their own through their European (French and German) and Russian influences, that were available to the English reading public through translations. The 19<sup>th</sup> century also produced some works of fiction classified as **romance novels**. Their main focus was adventure, involving heroes and villains in improbable but imaginative situations. Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand, Sir Walter Scott, Alexander Dumas, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville are examples.

Some novelists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as the Bronte sisters and Charles Dickens blended romantic and realistic elements in their works.

**Naturalism** was a literary movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The movement is considered to be the extreme form of Realism. Naturalist writers depicted their narratives and the settings in extremely realistic manner with characters that are influenced by their family background, social conditioning and environments. Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris are some of the writers who are considered naturalist novelists.

The dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of **modernism** that came into the fore. Modernism too began as a movement in art and sculpture. Modernist literature tried to break away from traditions and conventions by experimenting with new literary forms, devices and styles, such as fragmentation, first person narrators, stream of consciousness, irony and satire. Some of these novelists are E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and William Faulkner.

**Postmodern literature** is literature characterized by reliance on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and the unreliable narrator; and often is (though not exclusively) defined as a style or a trend which emerged in the post-World War II era. Postmodernist writers were more radical in experimenting with the traditional literary forms and styles. Postmodernists include Thomas Pynchon who wrote *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), William Burroughs, Donald Barthelme, and John Barthe.

In common with all other literary genres, the contemporary novel also deals with a variety of subject matter. With the disillusionments brought forth by war, advancements in technology and greater social freedom, the writers feel they could and should write about anything that arrests their interest. Contemporary novels range from **postcolonial novels** to modern dystopic narratives that analyse scientific advancements. The postcolonial novel too differentiates itself as diasporic fiction and ethnic writing. Though many of these terms are not exclusive or exhaustive, it is important to note that the English novel is no longer limited to fiction from the UK or the USA, but includes fiction from former colonial states such as India, Sri Lanka, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

### **2.1.2 The elements/ characteristics of the novel**

The elements that make up a novel are similar to those that make up a short story. The greater length of a novel allows an author to develop one or more characters, to provide detailed settings, and to construct complicated plots. A novel usually has several sub-plots in addition to its central plot. The events in a novel can take place in a number of locations and over a long period of time. This variety in setting, character and plot make for multiple interpretations, and therefore, it is entirely possible for readers to identify more than one theme in a novel.

Novels can have varying lengths, and multiple narrative styles. The modern novel destabilises the accepted norms about novels and their narratives, especially with the advent of social media and electronic modes of publishing/ disseminating creative works.

## 2.2 Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Thomas Hardy

### 2.2.1 Introduction

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is Thomas Hardy's 13<sup>th</sup> novel, and is recognized as one of his greatest works. It was published in 1891 in serialized form in a weekly magazine of the time, the *Graphic*. Critical responses to the novel were both favourable and hostile. Some agreed that it was an achievement while others condemned its immorality. Defiant, Hardy added the subtitle "A Pure Woman" to the title. This clearly showed that Hardy's sympathies and affections were with his heroine. Although Tess, the protagonist is a fallen woman by Victorian standards, Hardy, through his subtitle, insists that she is pure and virtuous.

### 2.2.2 Background: The Victorian Age

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was published in 1891, during the Victorian Age. In fact, he is considered the last of the greatest of the Victorian novelists. Therefore, a brief explanation of the Victorian Era is critical before interpreting the text as the world Thomas Hardy lived in had a profound effect on the writing. The Victorian Age (1837-1901) is an age of industrial and technical progress and prosperity. Ruled and defined by Queen Victoria, England witnessed rapid social growth and transformation due to the Industrial Revolution. London became the centre of influence as a result of the mechanization and urbanization of society and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were iron ships, fast railways, printing presses, telegraph, photography, cable and universal compulsory education. With the industrial revolution, a new category called the Middle Class emerged which included businessmen, entrepreneurs, clerks, managers, lawyers etc. Once established the Middle Class converted economic power to political advantage and not only defined itself in opposition to the working class who was labouring at the factories, but also took control of many areas of Victorian society.

Despite such immense advancement and scientific discovery, it was also an age of conflict and anxiety. During this time, the upper and middle classes were able to advance financially while the working classes remained mostly disadvantaged, due to poor labour laws and social discrimination. Faced with poverty, they faced wretched work and living conditions. Child labour was rampant and women workers were ill-treated and underpaid, and forced to meet brutal

conditions in mills and factories. It was also an age of conflict between science and religion where Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 had begun to undermine religious authority. Alongside urban life, rural life still existed as England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was largely an agricultural country. Hardy presents a transitional society, where the rural society is being transformed due to labour migration to urban centres. But the country still retains much of its agricultural practices and the countryside. Peasants move to the city to work in mills and factories, and agricultural work is gradually being mechanized. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy presents the gradual destruction of the rural working class through Flintcomb-Ash and its threshing machine.

The Victorian Age was also an age of diverse social standards. The middle classes focused on morality, respectability and social ethics, and valued duty, self-restraint, decorum, faith, and devotion. Yet, during the Victorian age behind the façade of respectability, there was prostitution and pornography. There was a double standard of sexual morality where women were subject to repressive rules while the sexual transgressions of upper class men were more tolerated, due to their socially hierarchical position. The women were required to be virtuous, chaste and modest, and were entrusted with the moral guidance and responsibility of children. Thomas Hardy too attacks the Victorian sexual double standard in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* which forces sexual purity on women and yet tolerates less than purity from some men.

### **2.2.3 Biography: Thomas Hardy (1840- 1928)**

Thomas Hardy is an English novelist and poet who was highly critical of Victorian society. He was very influenced by writers such as Charles Dickens who also criticized Victorian society, but Hardy's focus was more on the Victorian rural society which was in decline and not on urban life. Most of his work is set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex and in his novels, he explores tragic characters who struggle against harsh social circumstances.

Born and brought up in rural Dorset, in south west England, he was the son of a builder and stonemason. His mother was a former housemaid and cook who instilled in him a love for storytelling and poetry. He grew up exploring the countryside around him which instilled in him a strong emotional bond with nature and his rural home county. At 16, he was apprenticed as an architect and later moved to London to pursue architectural training. Yet he gradually gave up

architecture, fuelled by his love for literature, and became a full time writer upon his return to Dorset. He married Emma Gifford but had a troubled marriage which ended with a divorce. Afterwards he married his secretary Florence Dugdale. He died in 1928.

A prolific writer of 14 novels, collections of short stories and poetry, Hardy abandoned writing fiction after the negative responses he met for *Jude the Obscure* in 1895 in which he depicted the impossibility of social mobility for the working class men and women. As such, Hardy remained preoccupied with issues of class, especially the rigidity of the Victorian class system. Philosophical in outlook, he lost faith in God and was in search for a new value system which he searched through all of his novels.

#### **2.2.4 Overview of the Novel**

1. Major incidents / aspects which need to be discussed: (John's discovery and search for his ancestry)
2. May Day Dance. How Tess joins in the dance but goes unnoticed
3. The death of the horse
4. Tess is sent to the D'Urberville mansion to establish connection with their relations and thereby make a fortune
5. Mrs D'Urberville in reality is no relation/ the merchant Simon Stokes changed his name
6. Encounter with Alec D'Urberville, the son
7. Alec finds her a job as a farmhand and Tess accepts
8. Alec's numerous advances toward Tess
9. Tess resists Alec
10. Fatal encounter in the woods after the fair and Alec taking advantage of Tess
11. Tess returning home to give birth to her child, Sorrow
12. Sorrow's baptism and death

13. Leaves home in search for work. Tess finds work as a milk maid at the Dairy Farm
14. Meeting of Angel Clare
15. Falling in love and receiving a proposal of marriage
16. Acceptance of proposal
17. Divulging the past and the failed attempts to speak of the past
18. Writing of the confessional note
19. Marriage and confessing the past
20. Angel's past history and the affair with an older woman in London
21. Tess forgives Angel
22. Tess's past history of Alec and Sorrow
23. Angel does not forgive Tess
24. Separation. Angel boards a ship to Brazil and gives Tess money. He also states they will eventually reconcile
25. Tess's struggle. Poverty and difficulty in finding work
26. Alec's conversion. Angel Clare's father Rev. Clare
27. Tess and Alec's second meeting
28. Alec's transformation. Temptation. Proposal of marriage
29. Tess returns home. Mother is near-death. Mother's recovery and father's death
30. Family evicted from home
31. Alec's offer of help but Tess' refusal
32. Angel's decision to return. He leaves Brazil
33. Tess found in Sandbourne at an expensive boarding house, "The herons" with Alec
34. Angel leaves heartbroken and Tess's stabbing of Alec

35. Tess fleeing to find Angel
36. Angel and Tess reunion and they are in hiding
37. Travel to Stonehenge, sleep and arrest
38. Tess's execution, with Angel and Liza Lu as spectators from afar

### **2.2.5 Structure and Point of View**

Tess of the d'Urbervilles has a single plot and a linear narrative that preserves the chronology of events. The novel is divided into seven sections, titled as phases. The various phases of the novel are named according to the stages in Tess's life such as "The Maiden", "Maiden No More". Each phase in her life pushes her further towards her tragic end.

An omniscient third person point of view is adopted by Hardy to narrate the story. The narrator, therefore, describes what the characters think and say. Although an omniscient narrator is supposed to be unbiased and objective, in this novel, Hardy uses his narrator as a vehicle to express his own views, which tend to be very sympathetic towards Tess.

The style is partly pastoral where nature is idyllic and the novel is narrated with a romanticised view of the countryside. However, it also contains anti-pastoral elements where nature threatens individuals and the countryside is full of hardship for the rural, agricultural poor.

### **2.2.6 Setting**

The action begins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in southwestern England in the county of Wessex, the fictional name given by Hardy to Dorset. Tess lives in Marlott. Later the action shifts to Brazil where Angel resides for some time. Towards the end of the novel, the scene shifts to prehistoric Stonehenge in Wiltshire.

### **2.2.7 Characterization**

There are several major characters and minor characters in the novel. While Tess is the protagonist, Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare play significant roles in the text in relation to Tess. As such, these three characters require an in-depth analysis.

## Tess

1. Sensitive and attractive young woman who lives with her impoverished family
2. A hard worker who helps her father support her family and assists the mother in looking after her siblings
3. Is moderately educated and has completed the Sixth Standard in the National School and can speak the local dialect as well as Standard English
4. Identified with nature from the beginning. A daughter of nature. We first see her in unspoiled nature and her white dress represents purity. She is portrayed later on as a milk maid in an idyllic setting
5. A victim of her parents' foolishness and vanity, opportunism
6. Is always good intentioned. Honest, true, sensitive and has dignity, devoted, and sacrifices herself for her family
7. Yet naïve, innocent, ignorant and helpless
8. Self-blame and low self-esteem, i.e. has a poor opinion of her own self
9. mature outlook / very philosophical
10. At times, independent and spirited
11. Guild ridden for the parents actions but more mature than her own parents
12. Modest and chaste. Tries to avoid Alec, wipes off his kiss and walks, refusing to ride with him. When the other maids dance and drink, she refuses to be involved
13. Idealizes Angel
14. Yet passive, because of extreme sense of guilt and reproach. Fails to see that Angle's rejection and his moral judgment is wrong. Accepts why he leaves her and blames herself for her own rape and seduction by Alec
15. Absorbs the false moral code advocated by Angel and prepared to accept his judgment of her

16. Vulnerable. Becomes a victim of Alec at the end again because of her family obligations and poverty
17. Retains her dignity and chooses to live in poverty after marriage and abandonment than appeal to Alec

### **Angel**

1. Son of a Vicar
2. Although Angel's father wants him to be a Minister, he wishes to pursue a career in agriculture
3. Modern thinker and wants to break free from social norms
4. Educated, intelligent, refined, open minded and more accepting of the peasantry
5. Questions religion and wants to break free from religion. Agnostic
6. Unconventional. Gives up a religious vocation and takes up farming
7. Role of a teacher to Tess
8. Yet misguided and becomes a slave of custom and conventionality
9. Demands perfection in women. Falls in love with Tess but it is a falling in love with a moral quality rather than a woman
10. Wants to believe Tess as a symbol of purity and innocence
11. Has seemingly unflinching love for Tess
12. Sexual prejudice blinds his intelligence and refinement. Severe views on virginity and chastity
13. Hypocrite. Confesses of a 48 hour relationship with a woman yet fails to forgive Tess
14. Slave to custom and conventionality
15. Responsible for Tess's situation despite her unwillingness and cautious approaches to get married, he convinces her

16. yet abandons her and leaves for Brazil after Tess's disclosure of her relationship with Alec d'Urberville

### **Alec**

1. Son of Simon Stoke-d'Urberville
2. Takes sexual advantage of Tess by giving her a job as a poultry keeper on his estate
3. Dominant and cruel
4. Unsympathetic, villainous. The role of the seducer/rapist
5. Deceitful and manipulative
6. Represents the mercantile class. His father was a successful merchant
7. Prestige based on family lineage is illusory and is not from the original D'Urberville lineage
8. Converts to Christianity yet it is temporary as when he sees Tess, his faith waivers

### **2.2.8 Techniques**

#### **Motifs/ Preoccupations**

**1. Tragic fatalism:** Hardy had a tragic view of the world where he believed in the general tragedy of existence. That is, Hardy believed that the order of things is already determined by a force that exists outside human will and control of God. He believed that men and women are the victims of an indifferent nature. So circumstances seem to work against the individuals with no relation to their own faults or the lack of faults, which we clearly see in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Circumstances beyond the control of Tess determine her life. Chance, luck, the environment and coincidence work against her. Her newly found social status, the death of the horse, encounter with Alec, the pregnancy, the death of her father and homelessness all trap her into a situation from which there is no escape.

**2. Realism:** Hardy presents us a realistic image of life, without sentimentality where individuals are harshly treated and crushed by society. He represented the ordinary, provincial, day-to-day life of rural England. For instance, Tess's journey is realistically represented. However, by bringing in fate, chance and accident, he also creates a world where ordinary men and women encounter extraordinary circumstances in life. Hardy was influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century Realism which is evident in the novel, in the details as well as, when he describes with great detail the different elements of the landscape, the appearances of the characters and the realistic aspects of the plot etc. But it is also important to think of whether Hardy's attempt at realism is convincing as presented through his novel.

### **2.2.9 Issues and Themes**

- I) Tess's rural background, poverty and helplessness. Tess's father is a freeholder, the family has security of tenure only as long as he lives. When he dies they are put out of their home
- II) Male dominance and the disregard for women - Victorian patriarchal society and its characteristics such as unjust social laws, hypocrisy, social prejudice, and male dominance. Position of women: women are subordinate and victimized because of their gender / Tess becomes vulnerable sexually and socially, and therefore is forced to lead a life of rejection and isolation in the end.
- III) Represents a transitional society moving away from the rural to a modern capitalist society, old aristocratic families and the rural peasantry begin to fade and are replaced by the bourgeoisie, or the urban merchant and manufacturing class. For instance, Alec's father is the wealthy merchant Simon Stokes.
- IV) Irresponsible parenting and the lure of money: parents fail to take on the adult role of protector. Parents hatch a plan and victimize Tess in order to establish kinship with the d'Urbervilles and thereby extract financial assistance. Alec's use of money to tempt Tess at the end after eviction.
- V) Class and the gradations of class - Societal emphasis on lineage. The Stokes who are members of the wealthy bourgeoisie seek nobility for further acceptance in

society. Sexual double standards in Victorian society, and relationship between virtue and virginity

- VI) Religion/ attitude to Christianity/ restrictive morality enforced by the Church/ denial of baptism for Tess's child
- VII) Education and its drawbacks/ Felix, Cuthbert and Angel are educated but lack awareness/ they exhibit knowledge of religion, philosophy and literature but lack understanding to make the right moral decisions
- VIII) Opposition or the tension between man-made laws and nature
- IX) Fate - Is she driven to the murder? Do her circumstances drive her? Is she a victim of her circumstances? She states, "*I feared long ago, when I struck him on the mouth with my glove, that I might do it someday for the trap he set for me in my simple youth...*" / fate is harsh towards Tess.
- X) Deliberate ambiguity of the "rape" / we are not told whether it was rape or if she finally succumbed to his forceful advances / ambiguity seems to be deliberate / In Hardy's subtitle, he affirms her as a "pure woman" / so through the ambiguity, is this novel challenging Victorian society? Since if the novel convinces the reader that she was violently forced, readers would have sympathy for her / He seems to take advantage of her while she is still asleep / But if readers are convinced she had sex outside marriage, readers would have perhaps judged her negatively / Hardy deliberately avoids both, suggesting perhaps that how it happened is not important, but that the consequences of the act for a Victorian woman needs to be looked at critically / But even though the scene between Alec and Tess is not explicit, it is implied that a rape has taken place. She is also ignorant of sex and later accuses her mother of not educating her.
- XI) Hardy's insistence that Tess is a pure woman / novel suggests that according to natural law, she is pure / society, on the contrary, is impure, insisting on social law that subjects her to ruin / when comparing her to the other characters, she can be considered as pure / Victorian society equates purity with virginity which is criticized in the text.
- XII) Reception of the text in Victorian society: The novel was considered scandalous, society was shocked by Hardy's references of sex, the depiction of a sexualized young woman

and her predicament at the hands of society. Hardy insists on her purity, demonstrates his deep sympathy for Tess, appearing to argue in her favour. He seems to argue that she should not be judged by her one action, and instead, her character should be viewed in terms of her innocence, her more wholesome intentions, her good nature and the circumstances that drove her to the situation that transforms her life

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## **2.3 Nectar in a Sieve**

### **Kamala Markandaya**

#### **2.3.1 The socio-cultural background of the author.**

Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 when the Indian society was in political agitation and demand for self-determination that led to the Independence of India. A local Indian leadership had emerged comprising local intellectuals, political activists and their sympathizers in the form of the Indian National Congress spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. The Indian people sought the kind of political freedom, people enjoyed in their own homelands.

Britain was supported in the world war by liberal minded Indian leaders who sought to obtain independence by peaceful means. But Britain enacted repressive legislation such as the Rowlatt Act denying the fundamental freedoms of speech, press and assembly and empowering government authorities to take into custody all political suspects without regular trial. This was followed by the Amritsar Massacre which is known as the Bloody Sunday in India. These roused the leaders who had hitherto adopted a peaceful, conciliatory line of action. A movement of resistance was begun in 1920. However a resolution was adopted for the attainment of swaraj (self- governance as advocated by the Indian activists agitating for India's independence from the British colonial rule) through non-violence and non-cooperation. It was a turning point in Indian political history. In the time period between 1920 to 1930 hundreds of thousands of people were put in jail. Consequently a certain amount of radicalization emerged with leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose insisting on a Provisional Government. But Gandhi opted for a declaration of Independence. The Imperial Government responded with the Government of India Act of 1935, which perpetrated communalism, autocracy and suppression of democracy. The struggle for self-government continued during the war, with Britain becoming more and more oppressive and authoritarian.

Under the colonial rule, some technological developments and through them economic developments were brought to India. A network of railroads of approximately 60,000 km was constructed. Described as British Colonial loot by Shashi Tharoor and Bipan Chandra, the rail network served most of the districts of the country. To resist the British and their economic

expansion, the Indian leaders went back to traditional looms to spin the rough cotton cloth known as Khadar. It became India's most enduring political symbol. The Swadeshi Movement advocated the exclusive consumption of indigenous goods to establish India's autonomy. The political move towards swaraj or independence was reflected in the literature and arts as well with poets like Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore

### **The Author Kamala Markandaya (pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya Taylor)**

Kamala Markandaya was the pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya Taylor. A he was a native of Mysore, India. Born in Chimakut to a Brahmin family she had first-hand experience of Indian rural life. She witnessed the Independence struggle of India and the changes that were taking place in Indian society. She graduated from the University of Madras. In 1948, she settled down in England, and later married an Englishman. Some of her major concerns are with the struggle of contemporary Indians in conflict with Eastern and Western values

Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* published in 1954 narrates an Indian peasant woman's struggle in life with the physical and human forces against her and her family. This novel remains her most popular work. Her second novel *Some Inner Fury*, published in 1955, was set in 1942, during the Indian struggle for independence. It explores the gulfbetween urban and rural Indians. Her other works are :

A Science of Desire	(1960)
Possession	(1963)
A Handful of Rice	(1966)
The Nowhere Man	(1972)
Two Virgins	(1973)
The Golden Honeycomb	(1982)
Pleasure Way	(1982)

*Nectar in a Sieve* was cited as an American Library Association's Notable Book in 1955.

### 2.3.2 Overview of the Novel

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a moving, eloquent novel written about a simple, peasant woman in a backward village in India, whose life is a persistent battle to care for those she loves. Written in 1954, it is set during a period of intense urban development. It chronicles the marriage of Rukmani, the youngest daughter of a village headman, to Nathan, a peasant farmer, who cultivates other peoples' land. Rukmani, who is only twelve is forced into marriage but she has no dowry. Hence she is wedded to a poor man. Confused at the beginning, she learns to love her husband and adapts to his way of life, which revolves around the land, the seasons and the vagaries of nature. Nathan is utterly devoted to the land and to cultivation although he does not own the land. Rukmani bears a beautiful girl-child soon after and becomes not only a devoted wife but also a strong partner. She helps Nathan in all the activities in the fields and starts a cultivation of her own to supplement the family income. After the birth of the daughter Irawaddy, she is suspected of becoming infertile. Her husband is disappointed as he needs sons to help him in his cultivations. Rukmani feels inadequate and seeks the help of an English doctor, Kenny. After his treatment she goes on to have six sons: Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Selvam, Raja and Kuti.

When Arjun is about eleven years old, Rukmani's and Nathan's lives change by interventions from outside. Industrialisation comes to the village. A tannery is built on agricultural land, depriving the tenant farmers of their land. The scarce water was used by the factory and the new settlements that grew around it. A long drought devastates their crop and the family nearly starves. The owner of the land charges a higher rent, and floods and drought makes it impossible to cultivate. The older boys find work in the tannery, but due to a strike over unjust exploitation, they lose their jobs. Arjun and Thambi migrate and Murugan seeks employment in the town. The youngest boy Kuti, suffers the most without food. Rukmani's daughter's marriage breaks up on the grounds that she was unable to bear children. She is abandoned by her husband and comes home, making her a burden to her parents. Want and starvation drives Irawaddy to prostitution, which was possible in the new modern settlements that had grown round the factory. She becomes the sole breadwinner of the family. Raja who was working in the tannery is found dead outside it one day. Apparently he had tried to steal something to appease the gnawing hunger within him. Kuti too dies in spite of Irrawaddy's

efforts to help him. Irawady becomes pregnant unexpectedly as a result of her prostitution and bears an albino child. Finally the land they were cultivating is taken by the tannery. Only Selvam finds work with Kenny in the hospital the latter had put up, but he finds it difficult to support his family.

Troubling times and circumstances drive Rukmani and Nathan to seek Murugan who is believed to have done well in the city. But they are disappointed when they go to his house and find that he has actually abandoned his own family. With nowhere to go, no one to help them, Rukmani and Nathan find Puli, an orphan who had never known his parents or received love. Hardened in the ways of the world, he helps them to find work in the neighbouring stone quarry and shelter in an adjoining kovil. They work for their daily bread and Nathan's health deteriorates. After Nathan's sudden death, Rukmani who had borne all the tragedies of her life with fortitude, goes back to the village, where Selvam and Irrawaddy live. They receive her and Puli with open arms. At the end she does not have anything to call her own, but she had love. The family had disintegrated but there was the inner core of love.

#### **2.3.4 Structure of the Novel**

The novel is related in flashback. At the beginning we meet Rukmani as an elderly woman reflecting on the events of her life. The structure allows the narrator to recount her life and analyse her experiences, tracing her development from girl to aged woman. The novel is divided into two parts:

- i. Ruku's married life with Nathan
- ii. Failed attempt to live in the city, after losing their land.

The action of the novel could be traced as follows:

#### **Chapters 1 – 3**

Ruku's transformation from an uncertain child bride to a confident young wife and mother. They live in poverty but it is not a major obstacle. They have food. Nathan's hopes of owning the land are dashed to the ground. However they face the reality of landlessness but hope that

sometime in the future, their children will emerge from poverty. Ruku's fear of not being able to bear a son proves to be baseless, as she goes on to bear six sons.

#### **Chapter 4 – 12**

The action becomes complicated with the putting up of the tannery. It is the turning point in the novel. This second section brings a number of complications:

- i. The marriage of Irrawaddy which proves a failure as she fails to bear a child. She is returned home by her in-laws.
- ii. The putting up of the tannery. This displaces the tenant cultivators and sets up new social enclaves which threaten the hitherto peaceful life.
- iii. The drought. The rice crop fails and they are driven to starvation. Natural disasters impact on them eg. Flooding, monsoon rains. The crop fails again and again.

However Ruku hopes for a better future, as reflected in the Deepavali Festival, but they are weakened day by day.

#### **Chapter 13 – 16**

Severe drought brings near starvation. It claims the crop as well as the lives of Raja and Kuti. The family fortunes fail and the two older boys migrate in an attempt to turn the tide of the family's fortunes and particularly to save Kuti, Irrawaddy turns to prostitution. Kunthi tries to blackmail Nathan with the affair he had with her. This brings out the secrets of each other's lives: But Nathan's and Ruku's marriage survives and emerges stronger. The family survives the drought and hopes, for better days.

#### **Chapter 17 - 23**

The family recovers from the drought. Ira has an albino child but the family shelters and supports her against the shame and vilification by the public.

## **Chapters 24 – 30.**

The climax of the novel is in chapter 24. The family is informed that they have to leave the land as it is purchased by the tannery. Ruku feels that the tannery had stalked her family and devoured it. Nathan and Ruku decide to leave the village and go to the city, which Ruku always abhorred. This marks the climax – the sudden and overwhelming change. It alters the course of their lives and changes the direction of their storyline.

The story now moves towards a resolution (**falling action**) when Nathan and Ruku make the journey to the city. They struggle to find Murugan but are unsuccessful. They are robbed and left penniless. They decide to return. They meet Puli who becomes a substitute for their sons who are no longer with them. The novel ends with the death of Nathan. The plot achieves resolution not through the actual journey to the city, but through the ensuing actions that take place in the city. The actions in the city lead to the final resolution of the plot, and Ruku's final return to the village.

The development of the action is linear with one misfortune following another. It begins with Ruku's marriage and ends with the death of her husband. It comes full circle – so it is circular as well.

### **2.3.5 Characterization in the novel**

Set in a village for the most part, but encompassing the rapidly changing social environment, the novel displays a large number of characters who are individualized and unique as well as representative.

**Rukmani** is the main character, being the narrator as well as the protagonist. Born as the youngest daughter of the village headman, Rukmani is spoiled by her status. When she was twelve and ready to become a bride, she dreams of a grand wedding like what her older sisters

had. However her father's fortunes have declined under the British and Rukmani is married to Nathan, a landless tenant farmer. When she sees her husband's hovel she compares it to her father's fine house and she sinks to the ground in fear and despair.

But instead of being sullen, Rukmani responds to Nathan's pleading eyes and reassures him. After this difficult beginning Rukmani develops into a very sensitive and caring human being. She learns the chores of a farmer's wife and even masters the art of vegetable farming.

Rukmani works with the land and draws spiritual strength from its beauty and fertility. She learns to help other women in childbirth, and adapts to the changes that the tannery brings in to the village. She learns to face the seasons of want and hunger equivocally. Instead of bitterness and anger, she exhibits tenaciousness and life affirming endurance.

Rukmani faces loss after loss over the years and her endurance is painfully tested. But when she attacks her own daughter in the belief that it is Kunthi who is making inroads into her house at night, she changes. She learns to live with the reality of her life. She confesses to Nathan about the treatment she got from Kenny and listens to his guilty confession about his affair with Kunthi, in the early years of his marriage with her. She forgives him and becomes tolerant of various conflicting social situations like her sons working in the tannery (which is offensive in terms of caste since being Hindu, working with carcass is deemed unclean. In a strict Hindu caste system, handling carcasses and meats are reserved for the lowliest of castes and they are discriminated due to their handling of meat) and her daughter's prostitution. She even forgives her daughter-in-law for not helping them when they are desperately in need. She learns to judge people by their deeds and hearts. Her compassion is revealed in the way she accepts Puli, the leprosy-affected child as her own. By the end of the novel, she had learned the reality of existence and learns to live with it.

### **Nathan**

Like Rukmani, Nathan too believes in the sustaining and replenishing power of the earth. As a young husband he dreams of owning land one day. But as the years pass the tenancy gains ascendancy over the rural landscape and his hopes diminish. Nathan is heart-broken when his sons repudiate the farmer's life and take to other occupations. Yet, he does not try to obstruct their dreams of a better life. Despite failure, hunger and want, he is capable of happiness, eg. He dances with his sons at Deepavali. He loves Rukmani passionately and praises her unstintingly. Nathan has his human weaknesses. He has had a secret affair with Kunthi early in his marriage, which makes him feel guilty and shameful. He confesses to Rukmani and asks her forgiveness. Rukmani loves Nathan passionately despite all his faults, describes him as an upright man. Nevertheless he refuses to eat the food provided by Irrawaddy, because he does not want to be associated with her 'tainted' money due to the source (prostitution) nor would he fight for food at the temple, because he deems it beneath his status. He does not complain about his misfortunes. Like the land he cultivates and loves, Nathan exemplifies spiritual harmony.

### **Kenny**

A white doctor who ministers to the people in the village. He cures Rukmani's infertility for which she is eternally grateful. Kenny finds his Indian patients both endearing as well as frustrating. Their poverty appeals to him and he believes in challenging fate. Kenny is mysterious, detached, moody and sharp-tongued when the occasion demands. He helps Rukmani's family in whatever way he can. He gives Selvam a job and a mission in life.

### **Kunthi**

The village beauty. Rather reserved and distant and extremely self-centred, she is sexually immoral and exploits any situation to her advantage. She blackmails Nathan to give her the

scarce rice he has. She is one person who welcomes the building of the tannery as it gives her opportunities. She is contrasted with Rukmani who believes in traditional moral values.

### **Ira (Irrawaddy)**

Rukmani's first child and only daughter. She represents her parents' expectations and values. She is very beautiful, is abandoned by her husband due to her infertility and she has to suffer much social stigma. She has a warm generous nature. When the family is threatened with starvation and her youngest brother lays dying, she becomes a prostitute out of necessity to help her family survive. But her sacrifice is in vain. She is devoted to her child later conceived as a result of her profession despite the social ostracism against the child with Albinism.

### **Puli**

A nine year old child Rukmani and Nathan adopts in the city. Suffering from leprosy, he has learnt the art of survival in a cruel world that rejects and ostracises him. He helps Rukmani and Nathan find work and food.

### **Kali**

Neighbour of Rukmani. She teaches Rukmani the ways of a farm wife. She delivers Irrawaddy. Contented with the traditional rural way of life, she does not believe education can help anyone.

### **Old Granny**

A kindly woman who ekes out a living by the products that the villagers bring her. Helpful to Rukmani. Arranges Irrawaddy's marriage and is hurt when it fails.

She does not ostracize Ira when she becomes a prostitute. She even brings a rupee when her child is born.

### **Arjun**

Rukmani's oldest son. Loving and caring, he takes work in the tannery to support the family. But unable to tolerate injustice, he joins the strike and is subsequently sacked from work. He migrates to Ceylon with his younger brother Thambi.

### **Thambi**

Idealistic like Arjun. He migrates after he is sacked from work.

### **Raja**

The fourth son of Rukmani. Driven to desperation by hunger he breaks into the tannery, killed as a result and accused of stealing.

### **Murugan**

Third son of Rukmani. Kenny finds work for him in town. Marries without the parents' approval. Abandons wife and child. Comes closest to the blacksheep of the family.

## **2.3.6 Issues and Themes in the Novel.**

*Nectar in a Sieve* deals with the following issues:

### **a) Displacement**

Rukmani and her family are uprooted from the land (the soil) that they love so much. Her family gets scattered through migration, death, social change in the form of industrialization (the tannery). Displacement is also more psychological in the case of ostracisation suffered because of working at the tannery and prostitution.

### **b) Industrialization**

The tannery claims more and more land. Agricultural workers are transformed into wage earners.

**c) Human relationships**

The love, loyalty and the bonds in the old rural way of life are all broken. Kunthi and Ira sell their bodies for money. Marriage is violated, its sanctity is broken. Children are no longer loyal to parents. The family unit breaks up. But despite all these, steadfast relationships such as that of between Rukmani and Nathan, Rukmani and her children survive all challenges.

**d) Poverty**

The changes in economic life worsens the condition of farmers who eke out a living with cultivation. Drought, floods and landlessness make life insecure.

**e) Exploitation**

Both the peasants and the factory workers are exploited. In the former system, there was more humanity. The peasants were free to till the land at a reasonable price. But the factory is merciless in its exploitation. When workers strike, they are sacked.

**f) Clash between the old and the new**

The old rural feudal way of life is shown to be more structured and hierarchical whereas the modernised, industrialised world is full of economic layers that are not visible to the villagers. While in the feudal society family unit is the centre and children are precious, in the new industrialized society, individualism prevails. This is both a positive and a negative trait of the new society.

**g) Social criticism**

The dowry system is criticized. A girl cannot marry without a dowry (eg. Ira). Childlessness/ infertility is condemned. Sons are favoured over daughters. Fertility or lack of fertility both in terms of humans and land seem to be a constant theme in the novel.

**h) Hunger as a threat to growth and life**

Humans are reduced to animals by hunger.

### 2.3.7 Techniques used by the author.

#### a) Narrative style

- i. The narrative is in the first person narration.
- ii. It is linear (chronological). It traces the events of Rukmani's life from her marriage to her husband's death.
- iii. It is also circular in its rounding up. Life comes full circle.

#### b) **The narrative is a flashback** - Rukmani – an elderly woman now – recalls her past.

#### c) **Images and symbols.** They emerge from the themes of the novel such as hunger poverty, conflict between traditionalism and modernity, social roles of gender etc.

### Symbols

1. The 'Jungle' is used powerfully to depict the harrowing conditions of drought and its effects. Humans are turned to beasts in their struggle for survival. The entire village is turned into a jungle – where friends have become enemies fighting for every grain of rice. Law of the jungle prevails in that the weakest succumb, the earliest (Kuti). Nathan and Rukmani wander from one jungle to another (village to city) where the crippled and castaways are engaged in a struggle for food. It is in this jungle that Nathan dies under a load of work and despair.
2. 'Tannery' invades the village, encroaches their privacy, and changes the environment and the very lifestyle of the people. Traditional values are eroded, humanity is violated. Tannery becomes a symbol of the disruptive influence of modernity.
3. The title – Nectar in a sieve- the illusory nature of happiness, and how it is difficult to capture, like nectar that passes through a sieve without being collected.

## **2.4 July's People**

**Nadine Gordimer**

### **2.4.1 Sociocultural Background of the Novel and Novelist**

*July's people* is a novel by the internationally reputed South African novelist and Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer published in 1981 during Apartheid. It is set in a near future version of South Africa, with a prediction of how Apartheid would end.

The immediate historical-cultural setting of the novel is the civil uprisings of 1970. But this setting was the tip of the iceberg of the larger political, economic and social morass that was South Africa.

With the formation of the Union of South Africa, in 1913, racial segregation began to be officially implemented through the National Land Act. This restricted the ownership of land by black Africans throughout the four provinces of the Union. When the African Nationalists came to power in 1947, the system of apartheid was systematized and institutionalized under extreme legislation. The Population Registration Act of 1950 which classified all South Africans into three main racial categories, as “Bantu”, “white” and “Coloured”, made the implementation of Apartheid possible. The fourth category – Asian – was added to the registration later.

There were more and more repressive laws. Apartheid (meaning apartness in Afrikaans) was further enforced by the passing of the prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950). Any kind of union (marital in the first law, sexual in the second) between people of different races was forbidden. The Group Areas Act (1950) physically separated people by assigning different racial groups to different residential and business sectors. This effectively prevented non-whites living in the most developed areas, which were restricted to whites. As a result thousands of coloured, black and Indians were removed from areas classified for white occupation. The non-whites had to commute between their residential areas

and the white residential areas with the help of a pass. The Pass Laws Act of 1950 demanded that all non-whites over sixteen years of age carried a pass book. It carried details of the bearers such as their photograph, fingerprints, name of employer and duration of employment. Passes were issued for one district, confining the holder to that area. The lack of a valid passbook could lead to jail or punishment.

The condition of the non-whites further deteriorated with the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) and the promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959). These acts widened the gap between the races by creating ten African Homelands administered by the establishment of tribal organizations – ie. Traditional Chiefs and Headmen. The plan was to create a South Africa split into a white centre and a cluster of black homelands along the borders. A turning point in the governments' "Bantustan policy was the Bantustan Homelands Citizenship Act, which made every black African a citizen of one of the homelands, stripping him of citizenship of South Africa. The aim was to make the minority whites, the demographic majority in South Africa. The blacks who no longer were the citizens of SA had to get passports to work there and this was made extremely difficult.

There was racial discrimination of the most extreme form. It was imposed not only in a geographical sense, but also in the form of social inequality and intolerance. Reservation of Special Amenities Act (1953) had imposed segregation in all public facilities including trains, hospitals, ambulances, beaches, swimming pools, toilets, even bridges and grave yards. Black schools and universities were set up in the Homelands.

Under this very oppressive system women suffered the most. African women had little or no rights. They could not educate themselves or own land. They were employed as agricultural labourers in the rural areas. The Pass Laws Act (1952) worsened their situation, as their men had to leave their homes and children behind to work in the white urban areas. Martha in *July's*

*People* compares her husband's return home as a diurnal course. Apartheid separated and destroyed black families.

In time, the implementation and enforcement of apartheid was resisted and opposed by the Black community. A number of political groups supported by liberal South African whites emerged, using a variety of strategies to resist, such as violence, strikes, demonstrations and sabotage. Among the most notable was the ANC (African National Congress) and the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) In the 1950s ANC advocated a policy of defiance (The Defiance Campaign 1952) led by its great leader, Nelson Mandela. The government, which was all white and all powerful, retaliated by introducing more draconian laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act, the Indemnity Act, and the Public Safety Act. They gave the administration unlimited power to crush opposition.

The campaigns led by ANC and the PAC to end apartheid came to an end with the arrest and imprisonment of Mandela after the Rivonia trials. The movement received a major setback as a result. But in the 1970s a new movement arose from the younger generation. Steve Biko, a black student leader started the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) which empowered and mobilized the urban black population. Its supporters were mostly high school and college students. The BCM and the South African Student Movement played a major role in mobilizing young students that led to the Soweto uprising of 1976. The Soweto incident that was meant to be a peaceful protest but which ended with about 700 dead because the police fired at the demonstrators, proved to be a turning point in apartheid. The ANC and PAC became active again and the violence in South Africa caught the attention of the international community. Due to increased pressure from the International Community against the atrocities committed in South Africa, the government was forced to free Nelson Mandela and hold a democratic election which resulted in Mandela's victory and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994.

*People* compares her husband's return home as a diurnal course. Apartheid separated and destroyed black families.

In time, the implementation and enforcement of apartheid was resisted and opposed by the Black community. A number of political groups supported by liberal South African whites emerged, using a variety of strategies to resist, such as violence, strikes, demonstrations and sabotage. Among the most notable was the ANC (African National Congress) and the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) In the 1950s ANC advocated a policy of defiance (The Defiance Campaign 1952) led by its great leader, Nelson Mandela. The government, which was all white and all powerful, retaliated by introducing more draconian laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act, the Indemnity Act, and the Public Safety Act. They gave the administration unlimited power to crush opposition.

The campaigns led by ANC and the PAC to end apartheid came to an end with the arrest and imprisonment of Mandela after the Rivonia trials. The movement received a major setback as a result. But in the 1970s a new movement arose from the younger generation. Steve Biko, a black student leader started the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) which empowered and mobilized the urban black population. Its supporters were mostly high school and college students. The BCM and the South African Student Movement played a major role in mobilizing young students that led to the Soweto uprising of 1976. The Soweto incident that was meant to be a peaceful protest but which ended with about 700 dead because the police fired at the demonstrators, proved to be a turning point in apartheid. The ANC and PAC became active again and the violence in South Africa caught the attention of the international community. Due to increased pressure from the International Community against the atrocities committed in South Africa, the government was forced to free Nelson Mandela and hold a democratic election which resulted in Mandela's victory and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994.

Gordimer had been involved in grassroots level political and literary organizations, being a founder member and patron of the congress of South African writers.

Internationally, she was seen as an open supporter of the African National Congress. She was active in the anti-apartheid movement, joining the African National Congress when it was banned. She advised Nelson Mandela on his famous 1964 defence speech at the trial which led to his conviction.

Internationally, she is considered as an interpreter of South Africa through her novels and short stories. However, in her home country in South Africa she has not had a large readership. This is partly due to censorship, but it may also be due to the fact that her novels examine complex issues surrounding race relations in South Africa. For example, *July's People* is located in the time of the civil uprisings of 1970. The author presents a very bleak and cynical prophecy to both black and white South Africans. In her work, there are no solutions to the complex racial and social issues created thereby. But it foresees an inevitable overthrow of the apartheid system of South Africa. *July's People* was written before the end of apartheid as her prediction of how it would end. Gordimer has written thirteen novels and nine anthologies of short stories.

#### **2.4.2 Overview of the Novel**

*July's People* is a fictitious account of a black revolt in South Africa, which violently overthrows the system of apartheid. It begins with the black officers of the South African police refusing to arrest black South Africans, the breaking down of public services, and the eruption of fighting in the major cities which quickly spread into the rural areas. The rebels have prepared well by acquiring heavy calibre weapons and air planes, with support from the neighbouring states like Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and Mozambique as well as socialist countries like

Cuba and the Soviet Union. Their forces threaten the white settlers like Bamford and Maureen Smales, a liberal white couple who flee with their three young children from their home in a comfortable residential district of Johannesburg and find refuge in the mud hut under the thatched roof cottage of July's extended family. July who has worked for the Smales for 15 years becomes their protector. He houses them in the hut where his mother had lived. She resents this and argues that whites should be looked after by the whites. But she defers to July's authority.

After being forcibly relocated in July's village, the lives of the whites are transformed beyond their imagination. In the bush they have none of the amenities of their former life – no electricity, no running water, no modern sanitation. Maureen believes that she is in 'another consciousness'. She tries working with the women in the village in their fields, digging up leaves and roots. When she accosts July later, she finds him riding on the bakkie (a light truck or pickup truck) which he has appropriated. He is critical of her working with the native women and she inquires from him whether he is anxious that she will tell him about Lydia, the woman he was keeping in the city. He informs her that she can tell Martha only about his role as a good servant.

The Smales struggle to adapt to rural life without their former servant, who has now become their master. They are deprived of even the most basic of suburban comforts — even a clean floor and water. Seats from their bakkie become their beds. They have to battle the ants, fleas, cockroaches and mice constantly hoping for news from 'home'. Their radio becomes their anchor. Over the coming weeks, the Smales and July struggle to define their relationships. What was once so clear and familiar to the Smales- master and servant – is now unclear and ill defined. Maureen attempts to shoulder more responsibility – like working with the women as well as controlling July and his duties. But it brings about a crisis in their relationship. July himself is stressed. He has to deal with threats to his person, family and community imposed by the presence of the white family. The village chief hears of the white people, summons them and

gives them permission to live there. The fighting comes closer and closer to the remote village and the local mine closes down.

The novel ends without any definite conclusion. An aircraft lands in the village. No one is certain whether it is an ally or an enemy. For Maureen either factor does not seem to matter.

She runs towards the plane, leaving her husband and the three young children who seem to be adapting and integrating into the new way of life. She has been drawing apart, getting more and more isolated. Her withdrawal is not only from the new social context she is placed in – the macrocosm – but also from the smaller, familiar one of family – the microcosm. Not only do the roles of colonizer and the colonized change, but also those of master (mistress) and servant (Maureen and July) and husband and wife (Bamford and Maureen).

Much discussion has taken place about the genre of this novel. Cecilia Urbina calls it a political novel – that difficult combination of aesthetic and ethics that merges anecdote into history. She further describes Nadine Gordimer as a member of an exclusive elite group of writers who reconsider the conflicting demands of both literature and politics in their works. Nicholls (2011) calls it historical fiction – a literary genre in which the plot takes place in a setting located in the past. Others see it as prophecy (Sahlin, Scribd). They see the manifestation of Antonio Gramsci's interregnum in *July's People* where “the old is dying and the new cannot be born”

### **2.4.3 Structure of the Novel**

The term “interregnum” seems appropriate to describe the structure of the novel. It is about a change, a reversal of the existing social order - clearly the old order is dying (Maureen's movement is ambiguous - is she running towards a hopeful future or a dead past?) and the new is struggling to be born. The old represents the colonialist, white supremacist society and the ‘new’

denotes the dispossessed black people taking charge.

The story of the Smales and July is a microcosm of the greater sociopolitical events of the revolution that overturn the power structures and human relationships (macrocosm).

#### **2.4.4 Themes in the Novel**

a) Transfer of power. This is an important theme in the novel. The transfer is political, economical (transfer of technology eg: the gun and the bakkie), and social. The authority of the white characters is made unstable by July who becomes their host as well as their protector. After experiencing social oppression (subservient to the whites, all his life he is not sure of his own identity or power. In time he asserts himself (throwing away the passbook). He rejects what defines his relationship with the whites – his old servant identity. He does this by appropriating the keys of the bakkie. Thus July's appropriation of power and how power transfers from one group to another is an important thematic development.

Conversely the white characters too have to adapt to the new power structures of gender, class and race. Maureen and Bamford also reverse their roles in terms of power and its enactment. He becomes a hunter (uses gun to provide meat) and even cooks, demonstrating a change from his previously accepted gender role. Thwarted by her attempts to support and control July in turn – Maureen finds it difficult to define a role. Her relationship with both her family and July disintegrates. It is significant that the children, the younger generation, adapt easily to the new environment. But both Bamford and Maureen who claim to be liberal whites resent the transfer of the power structures.

To represent the transfer of power and the emerging relationships which have overturned, the author uses concrete objects. Eg: Bam's gun and the yellow bakkie (and its keys). At the beginning the Smales family owns these objects but as the narrative progresses their grasp on

these objects is loosened and July and his comrades assume ownership of these objects. The transfer of ownership reflects the parallel transfer of power which occurs in Johannesburg.

**b) The colonizer and the colonized other.**

Both the colonizer and the colonized used to be fixed in their roles. July in his present dual role as servant and host, maintains his old habits of servility, but asserts himself as powerful. He manipulates the Smales as well as his people. Both the groups need to re-adjust themselves to the challenges of their changed/ evolving roles. Therefore, neither the colonizer nor the colonized are fixed identities, but are rather changing power structures.

**c) Power relations**

Power relations shift- both political, social and personal. The supremacy of the white nationalists is challenged and overturned. The black majority seizes power. Existing social structures are overturned, eg: the traditional status of the chief. The whites become dependents on the blacks for sheer survival (their very lives depends on the generosity/ otherwise of the black community). Within the Smales family there are role reversals.

**d) Identity and the evolving nature of identity**

Refer to previous discussion on the colonizer and the colonized. Both groups have to take on new identities.

**e) Conflict and Reconciliation**

The conflict between the colonizer and the colonized continues externally and internally in spite of upturned positions in society. Even the 'liberal minded' characters bear within them an ambiguity: while both the groups commit themselves to political causes, the white people often retain their inherited 'white privilege' and thus remain outside the experiences of the ordinary.

**f) Language**

The colonizer and colonized speak two languages. (eg: July's family and Maureen). They cannot speak to each other. They can only speak to July (the hybrid, the man wedged between two half cultures). But even July's language is not totally comprehensible.

g) **Solidarity is elusive**

Groping towards solidarity ends in 'abnegation', 'exile' imprisonment or violence. Despite their opposition to the system of apartheid, deep down they share with apartheid supporters the same racial prejudices and lack of communication is kept deliberately elusive. This is reflected in the title. The phrase July's People appear twice in the novel – the first time referring to the Smales family and second time to July's extended family. Once he refers to July's white people to distinguish them from his relations. The title itself is ambiguous, suggesting the ambiguity of human relationships.

#### 2.4.6 Characterization

a) **July** - The black servant of Maureen and Bamford Smales.

He essentially belongs to the two dominant cultures, black, due to his birth and ancestry, white, due to his occupation and association. A man who has two identities within his socio-political roles - the black colonized self who is in a servile relationship with his white masters and an independent black life within his family as husband, master and provider performing the traditional 'male role'. The ambiguity of the title of the novel also suggests this, as July's people refer both to his white people and the Smales family and to his own tribal people who are angry at the intrusion of the white family from July's 'other life', his other self. It is suggested that he is very much in control and manipulates the situation. It is also significant that he can speak both English and the native language. He could choose to speak or not to speak. His character is symbolic in that it suggests the newly emerging leadership.

b) **Maureen Smales** - The protagonist of the novel.

Born to the management class of the white South Africans she has enjoyed all the privileges of the ruling class. In the novel she is represented as a Miranda-like figure – caught between her colonizing and colonized selves in the colonial equation. The inversion of the colonial situation does not lead to the re-education and self discovery of Maureen but rather to her flight from the overturning of the old order both within her marriage and her relationship with July. She is liberal minded and reacts humanistically to the problems of the black people around her. She treats her black servants with generosity. But within her one observes an 'ambiguity'. She is different to the white nationalists in her outlook and is committed to just treatment of the black

nationals- yet she 'retains her inherited white privilege' and hence remains outside the experience of ordinary people. She makes rather an in - effective overture to July's People- his wife and mother- but fails to establish a solid connection, not only because of her white privilege but also because of the language barrier. She faces challenges and obstacles in her marriage and personal life due to the enforced domesticity and indifference she has had to undergo. At the end, she chooses to flee to an unknown future.

**c) Bamford Smales - Husband of Maureen**

The white male patriarch. He is the 'success' story – white, educated (an architect; an artiste), cultured intellectual- the colonizer who is in command of modern technology (the bakkie and gun). But he finds the accoutrements of 'civilization' either useless or stolen. In the new situation that has been created, where the old order has changed, his 'strengths' have become either liabilities or completely useless. He accepts his role into domesticity (he cooks mealie meal and feeds his children) and takes over the roles earlier performed by Maureen . He becomes the hunter who provides meat to the black villagers.

**d) Martha**

July's tribal wife. She represents traditional culture i.e. motherhood, wifhood. But she acquires values of consumerism and instincts of white culture through July, who has been sending both money and artefacts of his white masters. She is contrasted with Maureen. Maureen attempts to establish contact with her but fails because they have no common language to communicate with. But she demonstrates strengths of her character through tolerance and generosity, despite her initial reactions to the Smales.

**e) Lydia**

Maureen's maid in Johannesburg. She is black servant who had to integrate herself into the practices of the white culture. Maureen's liberal outlook is brought out through her relationship with Lydia - an easy, informal relationship devoid of racial prejudice. Lydia has an unorthodox, illicit relationship with July.

### 2.4.7 Narrative Techniques

Related from a third person point of view, the tone of the narrative is that of dispassionate documentation. The voice reports on the activities and behaviour of the characters as they adjust to their state. However the narration does not provide any information about the context that might explain the situation. Therefore it is not an omniscient narrator of the traditional type, but a 'limited third person narrative' that does not reveal the thoughts and feelings of all the characters, but focuses on the perspective of one character. This way the narrator knows only as much as the Smales know or less. As the focus of the story is Maureen, it is her thoughts that are more often revealed; the story told is filtered through her and by her worldview.

The shift from the political/ public to the personal in the narrative too is an important technique that adds more depth to the novel.

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## 2.5 The Remains of the Day

Kazuo Ishiguro

### 2.5.1 Socio-cultural back ground of the Novel

“The Remains of the day” written by Kazuo Ishiguro in 1988 is set in the mid 1950s in England. Though the narrative takes place in a post-world war period with no direct references to the World Wars and their many repercussions, the majority of the narrative is concerned with the political developments during the First World War and how it has impacted the almost bucolic lifestyle of the inhabitants of Darlington Hall.

The important role played by Lord Darlington, especially as a Nazi sympathiser that led to his ultimate downfall becomes important information that shapes the plot of the novel in a significant manner. Butler Stevens and his loyalty to his master, Lord Darlington, is tinged with the references to the political developments that took place with the Treaty of Versailles. Thus the Versailles Treaty becomes an important socio-historical background to the novel that develops within the shadow of pre second world war political developments and post first world war animosities.

Another important aspect addressed in the novel is the deterioration of the old English values represented by the slow deterioration of Darlington Hall. Butler Stevens is disappointed with the way the old values are changing and is nostalgic about the old times at Darlington Hall. He reminisces about the old work ethics, efficiency and the loyalty of the old staff and the old world glory of British values and diplomatic relations during Lord Darlington’s time at Darlington Hall. Stevens’ resentment about the changing values, especially represented by his new employer are brought forth in the narrative as a comment about the resistance of the old world towards social changes in the face of post war modernisation.

### 2.5.2 Introduction to the author

Kazuo Ishiguro is a Japanese British novelist who won the Booker Prize for his third novel *The Remains of the Day*. He is usually associated with the postcolonial novel despite the fact that his novels are mostly about individual memories and individual experiences. Ishiguro has been

an outsider to his ancestral Japanese culture because of his British upbringing as well as an outsider to his British life due to his racial ancestry. Thus he has always felt an outsider to both the cultures and his novels explore these complicated identity issues, of being a constant outsider.

*The Remains of the Day* is an important addition to his novels that concern dystopic futures (an imagined future where everything is bad or in disarray, the opposite of utopia), memories of individuals and issues of identity, by falling in to none of the categories mentioned above. *The Remains of the Day* explores the quintessential British experience of coming to terms with rapid post war changes in a post imperialist and a postcolonial society. Ishiguro uses his narrator and the narrator's memories of a British past represented by Darlington Hall to discuss the deterioration of old British values in the face of post war, post imperialist society that was changing rapidly.

As a novel, *The Remains of the Day* discusses the importance of memories and can be categorised as a fictional memoir or a fictional autobiography. The important aspect of the novel is its fictionalised account of a set of events that take place over the course of six days. But despite the time frame of six days the, the plot is concerned with the memories of its principal character, Butler Stevens.

### **2.5.3 Overview of the novel**

The novel begins its narrative in the 1956, after Darlington Hall has been sold off to an American, Mr Faraday. Stevens, the butler has decided to take his new employer's suggestion to take a vacation and has decided to visit an old friend of his, who used to be the housekeeper at Darlington Hall. This trip, and Stevens' decision to take the trip, together with his deliberations and extensive planning is narrated in the Prologue of the novel. While Stevens's present decisions frame the narration, it is his ponderings of the past grandeur that sets the tone for the rest of the plot.

The novel progresses with Stevens' travels to visit Miss Kenton. Miss Kenton, who used be the Housekeeper at Darlington Hall twenty years ago, moved to West Country after her marriage and lives there. Stevens decides to visit Miss Kenton after receiving a letter from her and finding "distinct hints" of her desire to return to Darlington Hall. It is Stevens' interpretation of Miss

Kenton's desire to return to Darlington Hall and his desire to restore Darlington Hall to its former glory that prompt the journey. Since Stevens is not used to travelling he readies himself by choosing his attire with care and also by consulting travel books since he plans to visit the countryside on his way to the West Country. These deliberations as well as Stevens' inability to "banter" with his employer, Mr Faraday indicate Stevens' values and especially reverence of old British values of propriety and decorum.

Stevens' journey takes him to Salisbury for the first night. On his way he has taken time to enjoy landscapes and walk up a trail to enjoy a quintessential English landscape which is devoid of drama and spectacle but is full of greatness. While he recounts his day he naturally reminisces about the old days when the butler's were expected to maintain dignity and greatness in keeping with the prestige of the position. He recalls incidents with his father which highlight the importance of dignity even in the face of difficult guest and personal dislikes. For Stevens, the British countryside and the butler's role become similar due to their dignified appearance and greatness that surpass petty drama and spectacle.

Day two opens in Salisbury and Stevens rethinks about the letter from Miss Kenton. He recalls how both their fathers came to work at Darlington Hall at the same time. Stevens meets Miss Kenton when he comes to work at Darlington Hall. He remembers how his father tried to carry out his duties the best way possible and how he had to take over his father's duties due to the elderly Stevens' failing health. Butler Stevens forgoes staying at his father's death bed to attend to the guest and is professional till the last minute even after being notified of his father's death. He considers it is a reflection of his great training and his professional dignity. He laments that such dignity seems to be fading from the post war, modern British society.

On the afternoon of Day two, Stevens reflects on the greatness of being a butler on his drive yet again. His car develops a technical problem and he is forced to take detour in search of help. Though the car only needed radiator water, Stevens encounters another butler who acts also as a mechanic when there is a call. While the mechanic cum butler is impressed with Stevens' occupation at Darlington Hall, Stevens is reluctant to reveal his associations with Lord Darlington. Despite his loyalty to his former employer, Stevens reflects that he does that to avoid unpleasantness about Lord Darlington's association with the Nazis.

After having spent the night in an old inn, Stevens begins his third day by driving with the radio on to improve his bantering skills by listening to a comedy show. When taking his mid-morning tea, he sees the village that housed the company which made silver polish; Giffen and Co. The company has now closed down but Stevens reminisces about the times when he was complimented about the silverware at Darlington Hall. This section begins in the past tense making it different to the previous sections. Stevens recalls an incident of anti-Semitism that took place at Darlington Hall in the early 1920s. Stevens fails to see anything wrong in Lord Darlington's act of firing two Jewish maids based on their religion despite Miss Kenton's insistence that it is fundamentally wrong. He recalls how upset Miss Kenton was during the incident and how she threatened to vacate her post because of such injustice. But Miss Kenton stays on despite her threat and Stevens observes how she takes all the vacation time and looks preoccupied. Miss Kenton admits that she is rekindling an old acquaintance. During this time Miss Kenton's only surviving relative, an aunt passes away and though Stevens is upset at Miss Kenton's loss he talks less about her loss, is short on offering her condolences but talks of work. Stevens considers his inability to talk about the emotions and be open about personal issues as a mark of his dignity. At this point the narrative returns to the present and Stevens is forced to stay with a local couple since his car runs out of fuel. He is considered a true gentleman by the locals and he is relentlessly questioned by the dinner guests about his idea of democracy and dignity. In the morning, Stevens complains about this to the local doctor and reasons that he is not at fault for not disagreeing with his employer Lord Darlington, but it is a sign of a good butler to not form strong opinions or question the motives of his employer. Stevens concludes by saying that a sign of a good butler is to show loyalty to his employer despite their misguided actions.

This section opens with Stevens' recollections of the incidents in the morning with the local doctor. The doctor is not impressed with Stevens' association with Lord Darlington and shows his disdain openly. But Stevens is unable to understand such reaction. While he is waiting to meet Miss Kenton he also recalls the time when Miss Kenton revealed her engagement to her acquaintance. Instead of describing his emotions at this news, Stevens is proud of his stoicism and professionalism. His detached reaction and his unemotional response once again are reflections of his conservative nature and the traditional approach to emotions and relationships. This section does not elaborate on the meeting between Stevens and Miss Kenton but ends with Stevens waiting for Miss Kenton's arrival.

The next section begins at the evening of Day Six. It is important to note that Stevens' activities on the Day Five are not documented. He is at a seaside town in Weymouth. Stevens recalls the activities on the evening of the Fourth Day, when Miss Kenton came to visit him at his hotel. They fill up on each other's lives and according to Stevens, Miss Kenton has aged gracefully, despite her sad look. But when Stevens questions about her husband she confirms that she is going to get back to her husband after a brief separation. At the bus stop, Miss Kenton tells Stevens that she has often dwelled on the possibility of how her life would have turned out to be, if she ever married him. This is the only place in the narrative where Stevens' emotions are revealed. He reveals that the possibility of a life with Miss Kenton and his realisation about his love for her makes him feel as if his "heart is breaking". But true to his professionalism and dignified stoic behaviour, he brushes the emotions off, does not reveal his hurt and bids Miss Kenton goodbye. In the present, Stevens is seen talking to a stranger who claims that he has been a butler at a small house and starts crying, thinking about his mistakes and his past. The narrative ends with Stevens looking forward to returning to Darlington Hall and pleasantly surprising his present employer with his newly developed bantering skills.

#### **2.5.4 Structure and setting**

The novel is set in the late 1950s in England, when the country was undergoing changes due to modernisation, post war cultural and social developments. The setting of the novel is important in understanding Stevens' dissatisfaction with his life and his desire to seek out his old acquaintance Miss Kenton. The inability of the butler to adjust to his rapidly changing environment and social etiquettes is portrayed through Stevens' inability to understand his present employer and his "bantering".

The countryside, through which Stevens drives to reach the West Country once again is reflective of Stevens' nostalgia for old British values. As the butler drives through the great and vast countryside, he revels in its greatness and lack of drama. Thus the laid back countryside, with no dramatic actions is reflective of his old value system and his beliefs in dignity and stoicism. The novel, which is revealed over six days recounts more than the travels of Stevens to meet his old friend Miss Kenton. The journey is a metaphor for Stevens' gradual self-realisation regarding the changes in his surrounding and also about his own past and lost opportunities. The organisation of the narrative, framed through Stevens' travels is saturated with Stevens'

recollections of his own personal past and the public past of Britain in the interim of the World Wars. The structural organisation of six days of which the fifth day is not documented adds intrigue to the plot of the novel.

### **2.5.5 Characterization**

#### **Stevens**

He is the main narrator of the novel. He has been a butler at Darlington Hall since the time of Lord Darlington and is a stickler for old British values and decorum. He is portrayed as a character who finds it difficult to adapt to the post war sentiments and modernisation that is taking over Britain. His desire to be great and dignified in the face of calamity and chaos is reflective of his old, conservative British value system. He disdains emotions and vocal expressions of opinions because he is convinced that it is a mark of weakness. Stevens' character laments the lost opportunities in his life at the end of the novel, but is optimistic about spending the remains of his days adapting himself. He recollects the past, and through every memory, he highlights the old values that enabled him to retain his position as a butler with dignity. He is also unable to see the faults of his former employer, Lord Darlington, because, loyalty for Stevens is about believing in the same principles and following the rules. Stevens' character is used to reveal the old British values and how they cannot survive in the changed post-war society.

#### **Miss Kenton**

Miss Kenton is the former housekeeper at Darlington Hall and was Stevens' only friend. She is representative of the changing society. She has been able to survive, even in a not-so-happy marriage because she was thinking of her future and was taking the best decision available to her at the given time. She has had tender feelings for Stevens, but because they were not reciprocated, she had married her old acquaintance. Miss Kenton is instrumental in bringing forth the denouement to Stevens' recollections through her sharp observation on lost opportunities and the need to look forward.

## **Lord Darlington**

Lord Darlington is the former owner at Darlington Hall and has been influential in shaping Stevens' ideas about the British values. He appears to be a controversial figure with his affiliations with the Nazi party in the interim between the two world wars. While he does not appear strongly as a character in the novel, his influence on Stevens creates lasting impressions on his ideologies and his beliefs about British identity, duty and obligations.

\*- There are other minor characters that appear throughout the narrative. They have not been dealt with in detail because of their peripheral nature in contributing to the development of the plot.

### **2.5.6 Techniques**

#### **First person narration**

The novel is narrated entirely using first person narration, told from the perspective of Stevens. While this gives the main protagonist the ability to recount all the past events, it also creates a one sided narrative which is biased. First person narration also develops the plot only from Stevens' perspective thus eliminating other important incidents that may have influenced Miss Kenton's decisions and even Stevens' various actions.

#### **Recollected memories**

The novel is a collection of memories retold during Stevens' journey to visit Miss Kenton. Stevens recalls the importance of dignity and British values that made Britain a strong country in the pre war days. Since memories can be unreliable and biased, the narrative once again questions Stevens' narrative by creating a plot completely based on memories of a single individual.

#### **Organised into six days**

The structure of the novel is organised into six days in which Stevens travels to visit Miss Kenton. The daily encounters on his travels are recorded before the narrative changes into recollected memories that reflect Stevens' beliefs and values. But the significance of the plot organisation is the absence of the fifth day. There is no recollection of the fifth day nor any record of the fifth day from the detailed account of the days spent on Stevens' journey. It is

important to note that the missing day is the day after the evening when Stevens met Miss Kenton and realised his loss. By not mentioning the fifth day, the impact of the meeting with Miss Kenton and the emotional turmoil Stevens had undergone after coming to terms with his loss, is given a lot of weight and significance.

### **2.5.7 Issues and themes**

#### **Dignity in one's profession**

One of the main thematic concerns of the novel is the dignity in one's profession, dignity in one's belief and even maintaining dignity in love. Stevens believes that he had been conducting himself with the utmost dignity, in his service to Lord Darlington and even in his relationship with Miss Kenton. He only realises how mistaken he is in preserving his dignity when he understands how misguided he was in his loyalty to Lord Darlington and how he had lost his chance at happiness with Miss Kenton. Thus dignity, both as a virtue and as a misguided affiliation are discussed through the novel.

#### **The importance of memory and how memory shapes the ideologies and reactions**

The reaction to different things is portrayed through Stevens' memories that are retold during his travels. The instability and unreliability of memories is heightened through Stevens' narrative because he recounts only what he remembers and the recollections are biased. Memory also becomes a nostalgic recollection of a lost past, because Stevens uses his memories to glorify the old British values and etiquette. The story is a collection of memories that reinforce the old British values and Stevens' inability to cope with the post war developments in Britain. It is also a recollection of British values that were preserved in the pre Second World War days and how Stevens is trying to come to terms with the changes around him and his lost opportunities during his past.

#### **Regret**

Regret is another theme that runs throughout the novel. Stevens regrets the loss of the old way of life. He regrets the changing times and he also regrets his lost opportunities, both in the personal and professional frontiers.

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## **2.6 Life of Pi**

**Yann Martel**

### **2.6.1 Sociocultural background of the Novel**

The novel is set in the 1970s in India and spans India, Canada with some references to Japan and Mexico. The novel is set in India, with references to Pondicherry and its French connections. Referred to as the French Riviera of India, Pondicherry was a French stronghold in the British Colonial India, which makes it an interesting place both removed from British colonial politics as well as part of a differently colonised region. Pondicherry retains its French influence both in its references to linguistic affiliations and colonial reverence towards France.

The novel also documents the socio-cultural unrest felt by the Indian people during the Emergency. The Emergency is a period of 18 months where the then Indian Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency across India suspending constitutional rights and giving herself the power to rule by decree. Across the country people agitated against this rule. The country had to undergo economic hardships creating dissent among people. The State of Emergency officially ended in March 1977, but by that time Mrs Gandhi's regime has lost its credibility with the Indian people.

*Life of Pi* is set in the time leading up to The Emergency in India. The Emergency plays a significant role in the development of the novel. Pi and his family decide to leave India because of the uncertainties that plagued the people in the wake of the Emergency. Even though the narrative progresses significantly with the governing decisions of Mrs Gandhi, the novel does not attempt to analyse the political repercussions that changed the fabric of the Indian society during and after the Emergency.

### **2.6.2 Introduction to the author**

Yann Martel was born in Spain to Canadian parents in 1963. Due to his parents' professional obligations with the Canadian Foreign Service, he travelled around a lot during his childhood. Later, after graduating from college, Martel started writing fiction and his first collection of short stories was published in 1993. His first novel was published three years later,

but neither did well, either in sales or in critical acceptance. In 2002, Martel published his third work of fiction, *Life of Pi*, which became a bestseller and won the prestigious Man Booker Prize the same year. It has since been translated into nearly 30 foreign languages and has been made into an award winning film of the same name by the renowned Hollywood director Ang Lee.

### **2.6.3 Overview of novel**

*Life of Pi* documents the journey of a young boy, shipwrecked and surviving with a Royal Bengal tiger. While the story can be read as a parable and as a bildungsroman, the novel has inspired a film by the same name directed by Ang Lee and has received accolades for its presentation of a young boy's growth into manhood.

The novel is presented in three parts. The first part is about Pi (Piscine Molitor Patel) and his younger days in Pondicherry. His family owns a Zoo and Pi grows alongside many exotic varieties of gentle and ferocious animals. The first part is important to set the overall tone of the novel and to highlight Pi's potential to survive with a wild animal; because of his personal experience of living alongside animals in a Zoo. Through this section, with reference to Pi's fascination with India's three main religions; Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, Martel provides an insight into the religious make-up of India and its vivid past. Pi's fascination with these religions also provides a backdrop to his life and its beliefs in the power of divinity and the existence of God, in many forms.

In the first part, the author also introduces the different voices that will dominate the novel and its narrative. The unnamed author's journey to India due to his restlessness and the chance encounter in Pondicherry with Pi's father's friend who was also Pi's swimming coach, Francis Adirubasamy. This encounter leads the unnamed narrator to trace the whereabouts of Pi in Canada and to unearth his story that will make "you believe in God". Then the narrator changes and Pi's voice takes over, recounting his youth and recalling his childhood in Pondicherry, India. The first section ends with Patel family's decision to leave India, together with most of their animals from the Zoo, to Canada. The decision to leave India, and the journey marks an end to the setting of the story. It also becomes the beginning of Pi's self-discovery, when stranded on the sea with a Royal Bengal tiger; Richard Parker.

The second part, which is the longest of the narrative, details Pi's journey across the Pacific Ocean, after being shipwrecked. The time he spends on the sea constitutes the major part of the narrative, detailing his interactions with Richard Parker and his general overview about life. At the beginning of this section, the ship is beginning to sink and Pi is fighting for his life. He finds himself in a life boat, with a Hyena, an Orangutan named Orange Juice, and a wounded Zebra. The hyena kills the zebra and then later the orangutan. When it was about to attack Pi, Richard Parker, who was also hiding in the boat, reveals himself and kills the hyena. This makes Pi and Richard Parker, the only survivors in the boat. In the ensuing days, Pi builds a raft, teaches himself to fish and survives on the ration hidden on the boat, while at the same time establishing his superiority over Richard Parker. During their aimless and endless drifting across the vast ocean, Pi and Parker encounter another sailor who tries to kill Pi who is in turn killed by Richard Parker. They also encounter a cannibalistic island, out of which they escape. Finally they drift onto a shore in Mexico, where Richard Parker lopes off to the jungle without a backward glance and Pi is found on the beach by other humans and taken to the hospital.

The third part is about Pi's recovery after being on the sea for so long and the interrogation he undergoes with the Japanese officials from the Shipping Company. The investigating officers from the Shipping Company come to question Pi about the possible reasons for the shipwreck and his story of survival. Pi offers them the story with the animals, but since they demand a plausible story he offers another version of the story with human survivors; the cook from the ship, the injured sailor, Pi's mother and himself. In the course of this story, the cook kills the sailor, kills Pi's mother in a confrontation and then is killed by Pi, in retaliation. At the end of the narrative Pi inquires which story would the investigators want to believe and they leave commending Pi's heroism in surviving with an adult tiger. Through this section, Martel reinforces the question about reality and the make believe. By giving two versions of the truth, Pi questions the acceptance of truth, and most importantly, what constitutes as the truth.

#### **2.6.4 Structure and setting**

The novel is formed as a framed narrative. There are two predominant voices in the narrative, that of the anonymous author and that of Pi. Through the use of an author note, Martel

insists that this is a recount of a real incident. Through the use of Pi's voice, in recalling his memories about this incident, the author also insists on authenticity. While most of the novel is retold from Pi's point of view, by inserting an authorial view as an outsider, the novel acquires qualities of a memoir, retold by an outsider. Thus by mixing both fictional and non-fictional elements into the same novel, Martel challenges the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. The last section of the novel also contains a transcript of an interview conducted by the Japanese investigating officers with Pi. This transcribed interview too aids in blurring the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction in the narrative.

The use of fantastical elements in the form of unbelievable situations such as an Island full of cannibal plants and surviving with an adult tiger who has human emotions, the novel uses elements of Magic Realism in its narrative. Magic realism is the use of unbelievable, fantastical elements to highlight certain aspects of an otherwise believable story. By using Magic Realism and by creating a postcolonial text that questions the veracity of truth as told in history (in relation to Pi's story of survival) the novel explores these two literary genres to discuss the importance of truth and the reliability and authenticity of truth.

The mix of genres (fiction and non-fiction), the mix of literary techniques (postcolonial and magic realism) makes Martel's novel a bildungsroman and an adventure that questions the importance assigned to accepted truths through an unreliable narrator, Pi. His name too asserts the irrationality of the nature of the narrative and the narrator. Pi ( $\pi$ ) is the Greek alphabetical equivalent to an irrational number that is a mathematical constant. It is used to reflect the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter and is listed as an approximated number 3.14159.

### **2.6.5 Characterization**

There are two main characters in the novel. Piscine (Pi) Molitor Patel and Richard Parker. While the anonymous author becomes the main narrator through whom the novel is narrated, the two characters Pi and Richard Parker dominate the narrative.

## **Piscine (Pi) Molitor Patel**

Named after a public swimming pool in France, Piscine's name gets changed into a taunt by young schoolboys during his school days. Piscine rises to the challenge and defends his identity by re-naming himself as Pi, which has precise mathematical references.. His fascination with religions and the constant faith in the higher power, even in the face of death and starvation, becomes his individual characteristic. His unwavering faith, even when shipwrecked in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, highlights his constant search for truth and his belief in its existence.

Pi's adventure with Richard Parker, when shipwrecked, is narrated by him. Ultimately he offers two versions of the same story, questioning the authenticity and the credibility of his narrative. Pi's recollections of his own life and his silent shy self that blossoms with his imagination once again makes the reader question his reliability as a narrator. Has he invented the entire story? Or has he actually lived through these experiences?

Pi's development from a young boy to an emotionally mature adult occupies the centre stage in the narrative. Pi narrates his life from his childhood to youth, with extensive references to his transformative experience of being shipwrecked and living with a live Royal Bengal Tiger. Pi's capacity to adapt himself to suit the situation and his constant faith in God, as a higher being capable of guidance and moral strength, enables him to survive the ordeal and live to tell the tale.

Thus, as a character who develops from being an imaginative and compassionate young adult to a capable, philosophical young man, Pi Patel embodies the will to survive and the undeniable strength in humans to adapt to situations and overcome natural calamities.

## **Richard Parker**

Richard Parker, the Royal Bengal Tiger is the other main character in the novel. Richard Parker gets his name through an administrative mishap but retains his name despite the mistake. He has been caught as a cub and was used to human interaction before his isolated interaction with Pi in the life boat. Despite his familiarity with humans, Richard Parker retains his animal instincts and characteristics throughout the narrative. There are no instances of Richard Parker's humanised actions despite Pi's belief in Parker's ability to understand him.

Richard Parker becomes the antithesis to Pi's human qualities by highlighting his animalistic instincts. It is Richard Parker that ignites Pi's will to survive in the face of all odds and face many adventures while afloat. Richard Parker also draws out how in a battle between nature and humans, there is not a single winner, but it is matter of will power and tenacity that gets you to the end. Despite being ferocious and fearsome, Richard Parker keeps Pi alive, by being Pi's immediate challenge and later the emotional responsibility.

On a symbolic level, Richard Parker is Pi, when he had to resort to primitive, animalistic behaviour to preserve his life in the face of natural and human challenges, especially in retaliation against the cook who kills his own mother. Thus Richard Parker is Pi, while at the same time he is only a survival instinct which Pi sheds the moment he is among other humans. Therefore Richard Parker's final act, of leaving without a backward glance, is symbolic of Pi's decision to let go of his primitive nature and resume his journey among other humans. There is no regret and there is no recurrent lapses into his animalistic self, i.e the avatar of Richard Parker, because it has served its purpose.

#### **2.6.6 Techniques**

The novel uses many techniques to bring out the non-veracity of truth and the unreliability of the narrative.

Constant fluctuation between narrative voices is one of the techniques that introduce the many versions of truth and its reliability. The anonymous author begins the novel with a note about how he found Pi and how he wanted to record the story. But at the same time, his desire to write a book, a fiction that will redeem him from his previous failures itself questions the authenticity of the narrative. The fact whether he invented the story or whether he really recorded a genuine incident becomes the central question the reader is left with at the end of the novel.

Then the narrator changes to Pi as an adult who recounts his childhood together with the adventure that changed him into an adult. Once again, it is interrupted with both Pi's present voice and his recollections of his past. Thus the narrative changes the perspectives very often by changing the narrative voice. This technique is deliberately used to highlight the thematic concerns of what is truth in the novel.

Use of the first person narrator is another technique used in the novel. *Life of Pi* uses the voice of the anonymous writer's voice and the voice of Pi to record the adventures of Pi. The use of the first person narrator makes the readers question the authenticity of the narrative and the perspective through which the story is narrated. By giving only one person the prominence in narrating the incidents that occurred, the novel and its plotline can be questioned because of the one dimensional quality of the narrative.

Use of magic realism in the novel is another technique used in the narrative of *Life of Pi*. The elements of magic realism, in relating events, especially in relation to Pi and Richard Parker heighten the unrealistic quality of the plot while at the same time heightening the intensity of the actions. The taming of Richard Parker, the cohabitation of Pi and Richard Parker in the boat, the substitution of people with animals in the narrative are all elements of magic realism used by Martel to highlight the dramatic quality of the plot. By combining surrealist and magical elements into the narrative Martel once again problematises the narrative and its "truth" as presented through a biased first person narrator.

Through a mix of genres, by combining elements of fiction and non-fiction in the novel, the author attempts to establish the narrative's credibility. The use of the authorial note to set the tone of the narrative together with the memoir style narrative of Pi, coupled with Pi's final remarks about him being investigated by the two Japanese officials all add elements of credibility to the narrative making it more factual and non-fictional. Through the use of Pi's recollected memories which are questionable because of his use of animal characters in place of humans, Martel incorporates elements of fiction to the narrative.

### **2.6.7 Issues and themes**

#### **The will to survive**

The will to survive runs throughout the novel as a central theme. The desire of Pi to survive despite all the adversities he faces, even when he is stranded in the middle of the ocean, is a core thematic concern in the novel. Pi faces many difficulties in his life, starting from his name to surviving a shipwreck. Despite all these setbacks both small and large, he faces his difficulties

creatively. The desire to conquer one's weakness and achieve the goals, through many creative ways makes Pi one of the most interesting characters in the novel.

### **The conflict between nature and the human desire to control nature**

This runs throughout the novel in many different forms. Initially the concept is introduced through the zoo in Pondicherry and Pi's keen observations about animals in captivity. The descriptions about animals who change their behaviour to suit their captive lives and the adaptability of animals to their captive lives is discussed in length in the first part of the narrative. Richard Parker's and Pi's friendship, especially during their time on a boat adrift in the middle of the ocean, suggests the ability of the humans to tame/ control nature at their will. Pi is capable of controlling Richard Parker, but he achieves his goal only when he understands and respects Richard Parker as an individual with strength. Thus the importance of respecting both nature and its strength and human intelligence is highlighted through the narrative.

### **Religion as an overarching concept**

Pi's adherence and acceptance of the many religious faiths that surround him, and his belief in the higher forms of divinity that surpass mere religious labels is one of the most important themes in the novel. Pi believes in the goodness of all the religions. His belief in a supreme power is evident in his acceptance of nature and its forces. Pi's name itself is a reflection on the belief on continuity beyond mere limitations and the power of unity, with its irrational reasoning.

### **The authenticity of truth**

The mix of genres and the confusing ending to the narrative with alternate versions of events also question the authenticity of truth and the veracity of truth. The narrative with its many interruptions and the unreliable first person narrators question the validity of its own narrative. The veracity of truth highlights the importance of believing and accepting the many versions of truth. It accepts the fact that what will be truth to one will not be truth to the other.

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# SHORT STORIES

## 3.1 Introduction to the Short Story

### 3.1.1 Development

The term short story usually refers to the modern short story, which evolved from earlier types of fiction in prose and verse. It is a genre of literature developed as a literary form of fiction in the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest ancestors of short stories are ancient tales, simple stories that date back to Egyptian writings that are 6,000 years old. However, there are clear distinctions that can be made between short tales and the modern short story, though some of the elements of short stories can still be found in the older forms of storytelling such as anecdotes, parables, fables, ballads, sketches, and tales that can be found in any part of the world. In Sri Lanka, Jathaka Tales, Andare's stories, anecdotes and fables share many common characteristics with the modern short story.

It was, however, in America that the short story truly came into its own. Edgar Allan Poe is known as the father of the short story because he is credited with setting up the first guidelines for the short story. "Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), American writer, known as a poet and critic but most famous as the first master of the short-story form, especially tales of the mysterious and macabre" (Madden, 2007).

According to Poe, the short story must have the following characteristics:

- It must produce a certain unique effect
- It must have brevity (a reader should be able to read it in "one sitting")
- It must have unity
- It must have intensity
- It must begin with the first sentence and not spend too long on background, setting, introduction of characters, etc.)

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When the short story emerged as a genre in the 19th century, it was seen as something totally new and modern. Popular and literary magazines began increasingly to publish short stories that

often reflected the dominant literary trends of the day. Up to that point, the primary focus of most stories had been on the plot. Beginning with Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of the most important early writers in the shaping of the modern short story, the short story developed as a unique form of fiction in the hands of the writers such as Anton Chekov, Henry James, Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, and Saki. By the end of the 20th century the short story had matured as a form.

### **3.1.2 Definition**

Many have attempted to define the short story, but its many characteristics elude simple definition. Here are several of these definitions

“A brief fictional prose narrative designed to create a unified impression quickly and forcefully. Eg: Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart* or Guy de Maupassant’s *The Necklace*”(Reading /Writing Frameworks, 1999)

“A fictional narrative generally centering on one climatic event and usually developing only a single character in depth; its scope is narrower than that of a novel” (Bernandez, 2003)

“ A short story is a fictional work depicting one character’s inner conflict or conflict with others, usually having one thematic focus” (Madden, 2007).

These definitions tend to focus on the typical length of a short story and the kinds of techniques that are typically present in a short story. However it must be noted that there are many short stories that do not conform to these typical features and contemporary short stories have taken on and incorporated new facets.

### **3.1.3 Common Features**

The features of short stories are generally analysed in contrast to the features of novels. Short stories generally produce a single, focused emotional and intellectual response in the reader. Novels, by contrast, usually depict conflicts among many characters developed through a variety of episodes, stimulating a complexity of responses in the reader. The short story form ranges from “short shorts,” which run in length from a sentence to four pages, to novellas that can easily

be 100 pages long and exhibit characteristics of both the short story and the novel. There are three basic characteristics that all short stories share in common.

### **Brevity**

As the very term short story implies, the most obvious characteristic of the genre is its shortness. A short story can usually be read in one sitting.

### **Conciseness**

Here, unlike in a novel, the story does not diverge from the main plot. A short story usually has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters. It focuses on only one incident (one moment in time/a slice of life). The story does not usually diverge from the main plot. It presents information which is only relevant to the tale being told. It usually covers a short period of time in the story.

### **One Impression**

A short story usually leaves behind a single impression or effect. It usually deals with one issue or theme. However there are many exceptions to this rule and some short stories may seek to leave a multiplicity of impressions with the reader.

## **3.1.4 Elements of the Short Story**

The basic components of the short story include setting, structure, character, and theme.

### **Setting**

Setting refers to the background against which the incidents of the story take place. It includes the place (where), the time (when), social conditions (background). Setting is essential to the story; the relevance of the story is normally lost in another setting.

## **Plot**

The term plot refers to the action that takes place in the story. It is a series of connected happenings/events and their result in the story. Conflict is an indispensable part of the plot of the short story. The following are the typical stages of plot development

### **Stages of a Plot**

- Introduction of characters and setting: Introduces the main character and other characters. Introduce the setting: the time, place, and relationships of the main character's life.
- The situation: Initial conflict - introduces and develops the problem the main character is facing.
- Rising action – develops the plot and problem toward a climax: e.g. a decision, action, conversation, or confrontation, or confrontation that shows the problem at its height. This heightens anticipation for the reader.
- Climax – This is the highest point of anticipation for the reader and provides “make or break” situation for the main character.
- Falling action - develops a change in the main character: e.g. an acknowledgement of understanding of something, a decision, a course of action, regret.
- The resolution – These two are also spoken of under the term, denouement. It develops a resolution: how the main character comes to terms – or not – with his or her problem?

While the development of plot in short stories is often described in this manner it is also important to note that there are many works that do not rigidly conform to these stages and may in fact exhibit newer and more experimental features in relation to plot.

### 3.1.5 Characters

There must be living beings in the story that think or act in order to keep the story going. They must seem like living and feeling individuals in order for readers to feel strongly about them. Characters can also be termed as tools in the hands of the writer to help him get his message across to the reader.

#### Four Methods of Presenting a Character:

- Actions or thoughts of the character
- Conversations the character engages in
- Conversations of other characters about a third character
- Author's own opinion. This might be overt, or may be implied
- The narrator, whose voice can be different from the author's voice

### 3.1.6 Themes

Theme refers to the main idea of the story, which can be either stated or implied. The theme may be a direct expression or a refutation of a traditional theme. The subject of a short story is often mistaken for its theme. Common subjects for modern short fiction include race, ethnic status, gender, class, and social issues such as poverty, drugs, violence, and divorce. This list is by no means exhaustive and it is also important to note that a short story does not always have to be a social commentary and may in fact relate to other issues. These subjects allow the writer to comment upon the larger theme that is the heart of the fictional work. Some of the major themes of 20th-century short stories as well as longer forms of fiction are human isolation, alienation, and personal trauma, such as anxiety; love and hate; male-female relationships; family and the conflict of generations; initiation from innocence to experience; friendship and brotherhood; illusion and reality; self-delusion and self-discovery; the individual in conflict with society's institutions; mortality; spiritual struggles; and even the relationship between life and art. These themes can be found in novels as well. It is also important to note that short stories writers do not necessarily write to convey themes, and that themes are essentially the

interpretation by readers. Themes are usually discovered in the process of analysis, and while traditional interpretations are usually endorsed in teaching, students are always encouraged to create meaning for themselves, and to identify different themes through a critical/close reading of the text.

### **3.1.7 Devices Used in Narration**

The art of the short story employs the techniques of point of view, style, plot and structure, and a wide range of devices that stimulate emotional, imaginative, and intellectual responses in the reader. The writer's choice and control of these techniques determines the reader's overall experience.

#### **01. Point of View**

The term point of view refers to the presentation of the story. The three basic point-of-view techniques are:

*First person* (the author lets one of his characters narrate)

*Third person - Author Omniscient* (the all-knowing author narrates)

*Third person* (author as an observer)

It is important to note that sometimes the third person narrative can also be flawed, subjective and one sided.

#### **02. Style**

Style is the author's careful choice of words and arrangement of words, sentences, and paragraphs to produce a specific effect on the reader. An author's style evolves out of the chosen point-of-view technique. The omniscient point of view produces a relatively complex style; the first-person point of view results in a simple style if it is recorded as "spoken," more complex if it is written. Some of the terms used to describe the style are: Expository/dramatic, Interspersed with dialogue /monologue

### **03. Plot and Structure**

There is a wide range of plot forms and structures found in the short story. A traditional plot as it was discussed above has a beginning (introduction of the problem), middle (development of the problem), and an end (resolution of the problem). Some short stories have the structure of their plots with the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards. Among other devices that enhance plot structure are foreshadowing, reversals of fortune, digressions, abrupt transitions, and juxtapositions of contrasting characters or settings.

#### **3.1.8 Techniques**

Writers employ a wide range of rhetorical devices for contrast and emphasis. They include symbolism, metaphor, simile, paradox, patterns of imagery, repeated motifs, irony, stream of consciousness, cinematic technique etc.

#### **3.1.9 Language**

Language refers to the choice of diction and its style by the writer. Here are some of the terms that can be used to describe the language used in short story

Lucid/abstruse/archaic/ultra-modern

Formal/informal

Standard English/dialectal/regional

Symbolic/plain

Casual/poetic

It is also entirely possible for a short story to include both formal as well as informal language, symbolic or plain language, casual as well as poetic language, and features of Standard languages and regional languages, which are manipulated by writers for different purposes and effects. This list, if being used, should be accompanied by simple definitions and examples, preferably, from the prescribed texts.

### **3.1.10 Teaching the Short Story**

When teaching short stories teachers can draw the attention of the students to the following:

What is the setting of the short story? (How does he establish social and cultural background?)

How does the plot develop? (How does he organize and relate incidents?)

What is the problem/conflict which is developed as the story (plot) progresses?

What is the climax of that problem/conflict?

What happens after the climax? (Resolution/Conclusion)

How are the characters developed?

## **3.2 Eveline**

### **James Joyce**

#### **3.2.1 Socio-cultural background of the short story**

Joyce's collection of short stories called "The Dubliners" is located in the Irish capital, Dublin and in effect the city provides the socio cultural back drop for all the short stories including Eveline. In the stories there are often references to locations in the city of Dublin. The stories depict Irish middle class life in and around Dublin in the early years of the 20th century. Joyce believed that Irish society and culture had been negatively impacted by two major forces: the Roman Catholic Church and England. The result was that Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, was one of the poorest, least-developed countries in all of Western Europe, Joyce believed that the socio cultural conditions of his homeland had a paralyzing effect on the lives and destinies of its inhabitants.

#### **3.2.2 Introduction to the Author**

James Joyce (1882-1941) is an Irish novelist and he was born at a time in which Irish nationalism was at its height. His family was Catholic and he seemed destined for a life in the Church. Yet he renounced Catholicism, turned away from the priesthood and lived abroad for the rest of his life. Despite him physically moving away from Ireland he maintained his close emotional links with his homeland which provided the setting for most of his major work. His collection of short stories "The Dubliners" was published in 1914 was an attempt by Joyce 'to write a chapter of the moral history of my country ..... Under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. "Eveline" is taken from this collection of 16 short stories.

#### **3.2.3 Overview of the story**

In "Eveline" we get to know about a young girl who is faced with a very important decision. She needs to make a choice between continuing to lead her drab unsatisfactory life or to run away with her lover, which holds the possibility of a more fulfilling existence. Although it appears that she initially makes the choice to leave her home she is eventually unable to go through with her decision.

### 3.2.4 Structure and setting

The story concentrates on one single evening in Eveline's life when she is faced with a momentous decision. The story is divided into two clear sections: the first and longer section deals with Eveline's thoughts and contemplation of her life and the choice that she has to make. The second section deals with scenes at the North Wall and the moment in which she reverses her original decision to go away with Frank.

### 3.2.5 Characterization

In her contemplation, as Eveline sits by the window, we are given to understand the conditions of her life as her thoughts move between the conditions of her past and present. These are some of the key issues that we get to know about

- She is essentially alone. Her mother is now dead and her brothers have moved away. She is left with the task of looking after her younger siblings and her aging father.
- She has to live with her father who drinks. There is a suggestion that she lives in constant fear of his violence which has given her palpitations and there are daily squabbles for money.
- Her dull job where she is constantly humiliated and picked on. However even this job goes not give her any economic independence as she has to hand over all her wages to her father.
- Her drab surroundings. There is constant reference to dust.

Most of the story is linked to the past and only one paragraph is linked to her possible future with Frank. The life offered to her by Frank, the young sailor who is love with her is in complete contrast to her present existence. Frank offers her a promise of a totally different life. He has already brought music, fun and affection into her narrow existence. Marriage to Frank will also mean that she can start her life in a completely new environment and she will also have social status through marriage. Thus, at this point in the story we can see that Eveline is placed at a crucial decision making stage where she must choose either to continue to live in this existence that has become unbearable or choose to avail herself of the opportunities offered by Frank.

On the face of it the choice appears to be clear – in fact she has already written two letters, one to her father and one to her brother to inform them of her elopement. However, even as she prepares to leave, it appears that she is not completely happy with her decision. She is still trying to weigh the pros and cons of leaving. She also tries to justify her choice not to leave by thinking of the fact that her father was old and would miss her. She also remembers one random incident when she was young when he showed her kindness and uses this as an excuse to consider the possibility of staying. Her state of mind is shown in the phrase – *‘a hard life’ — but now that she about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable life*. By the time we reach the second half of the story we have been prepared for her refusal to leave, by what we have seen so far of her character.

It is interesting to note that she makes the decision to leave in a moment of blind panic when she remembers the horror of her mother’s end. She remembers the incoherent ramblings of the dying woman driven to madness by *‘a life of commonplace sacrifices closing in that final craziness’* It is a life very much like hers and if Eve line stays it appears that she will also face the horror of this same end. This memory of her mother lays a ‘spell’ on her and she is thrown in to a state of terror making her think blindly of “escape” and it is this that propels her to make the decision. However even at this point her need to constantly justify herself –*why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness* – indicates that the decision is not a final decision to and could be subject to change.

The final section takes place near the North wall at the harbour where Eve line is about to board the ship that will take her to her new life. Here we find the chronic indecision that plagues her taking a new and more pervasive form. She becomes paralyzed and unable to act and this takes on a very physical form – she feels nausea, and it feels as if the ship’s bell “clangs” upon her heart. It is interesting to note that in the end Frank who offers her the only possibility of escape also becomes hostile in her eyes: *All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.* Our final vision of her is a woman crippled by indecision and almost animal-like in her despair as she lets out a cry of anguish. In the end she *‘Set her white face to him, passive like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love recognition or farewell’*

### 3.2.6 Techniques

One of the chief features of the short story is that we are given access to Eveline's thought processes. This narrative technique in which we are given access into the character's thoughts is called **free indirect discourse**. Through this technique we are given access to the workings of Eveline's mind which helps us to understand the kind of emotional issues that she faces. There are many occasions in the text we are given unmediated access to her thought processes as they take place, such as in the following:

She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question.....What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say she was a fool, perhaps; and her place would be filled up by advertisement. Miss Gavan would be glad. She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening.

You will notice in the above paragraph the author commenting on her actions "*She had consented to go away, to leave her home*" which is interspersed with her own voice conveying directly her subjective consciousness: *What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow?*

Joyce focuses on Eveline's subjective consciousness and thereby depicts the change of mind. Instead of merely reporting what happens we are meant to experience the flux of thoughts and emotions which makes her final actions very credible. We experience her mind as it changes instead of merely being given a second hand reporting.

One of the key features that we notice is that her flow of thoughts is portrayed in a very naturalistic manner. Her thoughts don't proceed in a linear manner and one memory often gives way to another. For example when she sees the avenue in front of her and the new houses her thoughts return to the past and to a time in which there was only a bare field in front. This leads her to the decision that she has to make which flows in to a contemplation of her own home.

Everything changes. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home. Home! She looked round the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years.

The sound of the music from the street organ triggers memories of her mother's death. The kind of non-linear thought processes that the story depicts has features of the stream of consciousness technique, a technique that Joyce perfected in his most notable novel *Ulysses*.

### 3.2.7 Themes

On the one hand it is possible to see the story of Eveline as **an instance of individual tragedy**. It can be read as **the plight of a woman who is crippled by indecision** and fails to make the one decision that could make a true difference to her life. This can also be taken as a universal theme as **indecision doubt and fear** of the unknown are universal fears. However Joyce seems to suggest that that this phenomenon is in fact symptomatic of a whole community of people and that **the social environment creates a kind of emotional paralysis that circumvents meaningful action**. The fact that this story comes from a collection of stories called "The Dubliners" indicates that the very particular **geographical location exerts a very powerful influence on its inhabitants**. Eveline is partly about **the conditions of life in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dublin** and how it shapes the individuals' lives. Here, the subtle hints at **the influence of religion** for example is evident in the picture of the priest in the home, the father boasting about this connection to the priest and the brother in the church decorating business are significant.

It is also significant that at the North Wall Eveline prays to God to direct her, indicating that she has no longer any control over rational action.

### References

Wynne -Davies , M. (eds)( 1992 )Bloomsbury Guide to English literature Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd: London

**<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/d/dubliners/critical-essays/themes-in-dubliners>**

accessed on 25th March 2017

### Further reading /Resources

Narrative technique in Eveline

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=narrative+technique+in+Eveline&vie>

### **3.3 “Cat in the Rain”**

#### **Ernest Hemmingway**

##### **3.3.1 Socio cultural background of the short story**

‘Cat in the rain’ is a short story that was published in 1925 and is set in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the years following the Great War, the upheaval of traditional social norms became a characteristic of this age. There is a breakdown of traditional notions of family and other social institutions, leading to individuals experiencing feelings of rootlessness and displacement. In this short story, the American and his wife travelling in Italy are representatives of this pervasive feeling of malaise affecting society.

##### **3.3.2 Introduction to the Writer**

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was a novelist, short story writer and a journalist. He belonged to what was called the ‘lost generation’ of writers who wrote in the aftermath of the First World War. The catastrophic effects of the war led to a loss of faith in religion, social institutions and traditional forms of family life. There was also a belief that traditional forms of literature could no longer respond to modern conditions of life. Many artists like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein and Scott Fitzgerald repatriated themselves to Europe, to cities like Paris where they began to search for new literary forms that could accommodate these modern sensibilities. Paris became a home for these artists and became a centre for artistic innovation and change and the literary movement that came to be termed ‘modernism’. Hemingway too spent many years in Paris and it is during this period that he wrote the collection of short stories called ‘In Our Time’ which includes the short story ‘Cat in the Rain’. One of his most famous novels is ‘The Sun Also Rises’ where he continued his exploration of characters who were part of this cultural phenomena known as the lost generation. Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1954 and continues to be read and studied as one of the foremost writers of his generation.

### **3.3.3 Overview of the story**

The events depicted in the story take place on a rainy day. The American woman sees a cat in the rain, and she decides to go out into the garden to rescue it from the bad weather. However when she goes out, the cat can no longer be seen and she is disappointed. However she is pleased by the attentions of the hotel keeper who sends out a maid with an umbrella to protect her from the rain. When she returns to the Hotel room she tries to engage her husband George about the cat in the rain which then leads into her making a declaration about all the things she wants in for herself in life. This provokes what appears to be an unexplained angry reaction from her husband that signals the end of conversation. At the end of the story, there is a knock on the door and when the woman opens the door she finds the maid with a cat in her arms – it is unclear whether it is the same cat that was seen earlier. It is also clear whether the woman will be pleased or not by this new development.

### **3.3.4 Structure and setting**

The wider context of the story appears to be an Italian coastal resort. The lasting presence of the Great War is apparent in the war memorial that people come to visit. The outer setting of the holiday resort and the way the locals interact with it by coming to see the war monuments contrasts with the disinterest of the main characters in engaging with their environment. The story takes place in a relatively short space of time in the confines of a hotel room. The atmosphere in the confined space seems rather charged with the unspoken undercurrents of the relationship between the American woman and her husband.

### **3.3.5 Characterization**

We know very little about the American wife – not even her name. What we do get to know about is that she is fundamentally unhappy with the state of her relationship with her husband. There appears to be a lack of intimacy between them. The cat in the rain provides a moment of distraction from the stalemate of their relationship. Her husband George is portrayed as a self-absorbed individual who does not want to engage with anyone except at a very superficial level. On the whole the couple appear to be uprooted and do not have any permanent home. It does not appear that they are on holiday as the hotel is completely empty and it is in fact the rainy season.

One of the key differences between the two characters is that the husband seems happy with this life style while the wife clearly wants a change.

### 3.3.6 Techniques

One of the most important techniques in this short story is Hemingway's presentation of the events in the story in very sparse language. There is a notable lack of description in the short story. Other than his description of the locale as 'big palms' and 'bright colours', there is no descriptive language or adjectives used. For example all the other descriptions of the rain and the puddles are given in bare language. This is also evident in the speech tags. Descriptions of the characters speech are limited to "He said" or "She said" with no adverbs that indicate the emotional states of the characters as they speak. This sparse presentation of the bare details of the narrative is called the 'iceberg technique' or the 'theory of omission' because in Hemingway's writing we are presented with a reporting of events while multiple layers of meanings operate beneath. Hemingway himself has explicitly commented on this feature of his writing. He noted the following in 'Death in the Afternoon':

" If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of these things as strongly as though the writer has stated them. The dignity of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth being above the water".

It is the seven-eighth that is below the surface that reveals the meaning of the text. Hemingway biographer Carlos Baker writes that Hemingway learned from his short stories how to "get the most from the least, how to prune language, how to multiply intensities, and how to tell nothingbut the truth in a way that allowed for telling more than the truth". The plainness of the style is meant to engage the reader in to a deeper more personal and reflective reading of the text. It is also the case that each reading of the text should give rise to newer and deeper insights about the story.

The narrative perspective of this story appears to be in the third person. The bare details of the events that take place are narrated without the author's own feelings and subjective response. However it is possible that the perspective which is highlighted is that of the American woman.

For example what is privileged is her view of the hotel owner and not that of the husband. The third person point of views allows the author to convey insights and feelings that the woman herself is unable to articulate. In fact the only times we find a subjective verb being used to describe a character is only in relation to the wife. For example the author notes that she ‘liked’ the hotel owner and that she was ‘suddenly disappointed’ when she found that the cat in the rain could no longer be found.

The fact that it is raining is also significant and the rain is used as one of the central symbols in the text. Rain often suggest fertility and growth however in this case the rain has actually led to isolation and a lack of connection. The following lines illustrates this fact

“The motor cars were gone from the square by the war monument. Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the empty square.”

The rain is also important in that it is this that triggers the wife’s sympathetic reaction to the cat which leads to her attempt to articulate her desires.

In the ending we notice that Hemmingway maintains the quintessential element of a surprise ending. The couple have apparently reached the climax of the argument with the wife’s declaration of a different vision of her life and his clear rejection of her view. The heightened emotional atmosphere is momentarily disturbed by the knock on the door and the discovery of the maid standing outside with the cat in her arms. The possible reaction to these finding is not made explicit. Is it in fact that cat that the wife saw? Is she happy with the appearance of the cat? Or did she ever want to find the cat in the first place? The story ends leaving the reader with these unanswered questions.

### **3.3.7 Themes**

In this story we see the state of the relationship between the American wife and her husband George. There appears to be no communication between them and they appear to have only a very superficial connection. The husband does not show much interest in the wife and this lack of attention is evidenced by the fact that the wife is pleased when the hotel owner shows concern for her wellbeing. These are attentions that she apparently does not get from her husband.

The fact that emotions are not mentioned in the story is in many ways symptomatic of the fact that the characters too repress their emotions and do not honestly engage with their feelings. The wife appears to want greater value in her life and her outburst signifies these deeper longings

‘And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.’

Many critics have interpreted the woman’s desire to have a cat as the desire to have a child that would bring meaning to her life. However this is a desire that she herself is unable to fully articulate as is evidenced when she says

‘I wanted it so much,’ she said. ‘I don’t know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn’t any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.’

It is also important to note that the woman’s description of the cat is limited to ‘poor kitty’, a phrase that she keeps repeating over and over again with little variation.

This suggests that she can articulate only a very limited of emotional responses. The only time that the husband shows any emotional reaction is in his outburst in response to what he perceives are her unreasonable demands. The story therefore highlights the importance of open and honest communication in a relationship and the possible negative consequence when such communication is absent.

## **References**

Giesler, A, (2011) The American wife in the Rain. A reading of Hemingway’s Cat In The Rain. <http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/31988/000784898.pdf> accessed on 26th March 2017.

## **Further reading/resources**

Cat in the Rain, by Ernest Hemingway (Analysis & Interpretation)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSvOEBEPk2o>

### 3.4 Everyday Use

#### Alice Walker

##### 3.4.1 . Sociocultural background of the short story

“Everyday Use” was published in 1973 as a part of Alice Walker’s short story collection, *In Love and Trouble*. It depicts the lives of black women of different ages and social status from the South who struggle daily against a backdrop of abuse and mistreatment by white people. Dealing with themes such as hopelessness, fulfilment, racism, sexism and desire, Walker writes of the hardship of previously unrecognized women in poetic and imaginative ways. Of the 13 short stories, *Everyday Use* is her most anthologized short story. Walker’s work belongs to the body of literature called African-American literature, which is written by people of African descent. African-American literature generally focuses on the role of African Americans in society and the political and social struggles they face.

Living in the racially divided South, where the whites and blacks were segregated, Alice Walker attended segregated schools and experienced racism first hand. Therefore, it is important to focus on the history of African-Americans in the United States. African-Americans are citizens of the United States with ancestors who came from Africa. They were brought to American colonies as slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries to provide a cheap labor force alongside European indentured laborers. By the 18th century, they were about 10 percent of the population and they were treated as slaves for life and their children were born into slavery. They faced brutal living and work conditions on plantations and were stripped of their dignity. They remained slaves till the end of the 19th century when most were freed after the American Revolution.

However, in the early twentieth century, although the formerly enslaved African-Americans hoped for full recognition as citizens after the war, the Southern states of the United States maintained the racial caste system where Blacks and Whites were segregated into two societies, led by the belief in the inferiority of dark skinned peoples. African- Americans were condemned as second-class citizens and were denied civil and political rights such as educational opportunities, and self-determination. In the mid1950s, many black leaders led disciplined mass protests in theSouth against segregated public facilities, racial violence, discrimination in

employment and denial of voting rights, which culminated in the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties.

Alice Walker too became active in the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties which was primarily led by Martin Luther King. It involved non-violent protest, such as sit-ins and marches and resulted in eliminating segregation laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. During this period, the Black Power Movement came into being which emphasized racial pride and ethnic cohesion among the African-Americans. There were efforts to return to and recover one's connection with an African heritage which inspired many to adopt African names, African clothing such as the dashiki and even natural hairstyles such as the afro. In fact Walker touches upon this aspect in her short story through Dee's appearance and attitude. Dee's Muslim boyfriend's appearance and language also identify him with the Black Muslims movement called the Nation of Islam which was also a part of the Black Power movement.

### **3.4.2 Introduction to the Author**

Born on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, USA, Alice Walker was the youngest daughter of an African-American sharecropper. Her mother worked as a maid and she grew up poor. She was shot in the eye by accident when she was only eight and lost her sight in her right eye. As a result, she became self-conscious about her injury and became withdrawn, isolating herself from others. Finding refuge in reading and writing, she secured a partial scholarship which allowed her to attend college. After graduating from College in 1965, she published her first novel in 1967. She received the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Color Purple* in 1983. She currently resides in California and continues to publish.

### **3.4.3 Overview of the story**

Major Incidents which need to be discussed:

1. Mama, or Mrs. Johnson waiting in the yard
2. Mama's understanding of Maggie and Maggie's sense of nervousness due to her injury
3. Mama's description of Dee in terms of a TV Guest
4. Mama's description of herself as tough and hard-working

5. Dee's expectations of Mama/ Mama not living up to the expectations of the daughter, Dee
6. Maggie getting ready to welcome Dee in a new outfit
7. The House fire twelve years ago
8. Dee's near indifference to Maggie being injured from the fire/ Dee's hatred towards the house
9. Mama's raising of money for Dee to attend school/ its effect on Mam and Maggie
10. Dee coming to their house/ Maggie's attempt to flee
11. Dee's dress and attitude/ photographing of the house
12. Name change from Dee to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo/ Mama's reaction
13. Dee's interest in household objects/ need to exhibit them in her home
14. Dee's interest in the quilts/ Maggie reaction as they are to be her wedding gifts
15. The debate over the quilt and who should own it
16. Mama's decision to hand over the quilts to Maggie

#### **3.4.4 Structure and setting**

*Everyday Use* employs a first person point of view as the story is told through the perspective of Mama who is poorly educated and disadvantaged. It is structured in terms of contrasts where the educated, independent and sophisticated Dee is contrasted with the unintelligent and unsophisticated Maggie. The first section of the short story contains more narration and reflection where Mama reflects on her background and on her two daughters. The second part of the story is more dramatic with the arrival of Dee with her boyfriend and the ensuing conflict between the mother and the daughter.

The story takes place in the house of the Johnsons in rural Georgia in the 1970's. Dee, who is from the city, visits her mother and sister who live in the country house.

### 3.4.5 Characterization

*Everyday Use* is built around a mother and her two daughters and the tensions which arise among them. As such, an in-depth analysis of the three characters is necessary.

#### Mama

1. Poor and disadvantaged but strong and confident
2. Physically heavy-set with manly hands
3. Is more practical/ takes pride in her capabilities: *“In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man”*
4. Is less aware of larger concepts such as identity and heritage
5. But is proud of her identity and black heritage/ for her, heritage lies in her ancestors who were slaves/ defends her choice to name the eldest as Dee
6. Is aware of the weaknesses of Maggie, her youngest daughter
7. Proud of her Dee’s success and her confidence but is aware of the limitations of Dee and how Dee is perhaps ashamed of her mother/ Daydreams of Dee acknowledging Mama’s contribution in her success story, but is aware that it is far-fetched: *“(What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?)”*
8. Is somewhat passive with regard to her Black cultural identity/ acknowledges her fear of whites
9. At the end of the story, she decides to give the quilt to Maggie and thereby stands up to Dee.

## **Dee**

1. The eldest daughter of Mama who is light-skinned
2. College educated, intelligent, ambitious
3. Represents the Black power movement, having chosen an African name/ changes her name from Dee to Wangero which she believes is more politically correct
4. Has a strong interest in the pride of her black identity
5. But it is a superficial idea of heritage/ does not acknowledge the survival of her African- American ancestors
6. Lack of knowledge of her own family history
7. Opinionated/ vocal and aggressive
8. Self-centered/ disregards Maggie and her position and vulnerability
9. Condescending/ smug/acquisitive

## **Maggie**

1. Youngest daughter of Mama who is dark-skinned
2. Victim of burn injuries
3. Shy and quiet
4. Unintelligent, unambitious, lacks confidence
5. Due to her injury, is very self-conscious
6. Dignified
7. Very aware of her heritage

### 3.4.6. Techniques

The story's central symbol is the quilt which signifies many things. Quilting has been a significant art form in African-American culture where skilled black slave women on plantations made quilts from scraps of cloth for their owners as well as for their own use. Yet it was also an exercise of the imagination where African-American women made beautiful quilts, as they creatively engaged in quilting, piece by piece, for their own survival as well as for their sense of worth. Quilt making in certain areas was a collective exercise where everyone would gather and celebrate the event with food and music. As such, quilts are a part of the African-American identity. In the short story, Mama sees the quilt as a part of her personal history, a collective memory of her identity. It is also a symbol of the bonds between women. This is why it is so important that the quilts are passed down to Maggie and not to Dee who adopts a different perspective.

In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War...

“Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes [Grandma Dee's] mother handed down to her,” [Mama] said, moving up to touch the quilts.

### 3.4.7 Themes

Some of the themes that can be identified are as follows:

1. A clash of perspectives as Dee embraces elements of African culture to counter how African-American culture has been devalued and negated in white American culture, even though Mama and Maggie find pride in their own past.
2. Questioning of what is meant by heritage: is it one's African roots or one's American heritage? Dee wishes to rediscover her African roots while Mama appreciates her history which was one of survival despite the pain and suffering.

3. The dilemma of African-Americans, who in their attempt to counter racism and prejudice, risk undermining their own heritage and past: Dee represents the African Americans of the late period of the civil rights movement who wanted to find an identity separate from that of the white American society. Her name change suggests her desire to embrace such a position but it negatively affects her mother. Mama reminds Dee that she was named after her aunt, who had been named after her grandmother so it is traced back to days of slavery, but Dee is perhaps immature and naïve to understand the position of the mother and the mother's pride in her own heritage. The dilemma suggests both the strengths and weaknesses of the Black Power movement.
4. Affirmation of the need to value old and rural ways: Mama's history and heritage are important and need recognition. While their lives have been painful, they have retained spiritual strength and have used it to strengthen their community. As such it is a critique of the cultural movements which ignore that history in order to embrace newer political and social movements.
5. Dee's position with regard to the quilt: Dee is outraged that Maggie will use it, as Dee wishes to exhibit it as a part of her painful history, considering it priceless for its artistic merit. Thus, indicating that the quilt is a commodity for her.
6. The significance of the title "everyday use": Maggie wishes to use the quilts for everyday use, as it will be a reminder of her grandmother Dee, which suggests the continuation of the bonds between women passed down from one generation to the next
7. Mama's defence of Maggie and presenting Maggie with the quilts/ chooses her traditions instead /The quilts need to be used / displays mama's courage and integrity in choosing Maggie/ While Dee ignores Maggie, Mama grants her recognition
8. Validation of Maggie's definition of the quilt: The quilt is a part of the collective memory of African Americans. Maggie herself can quilt and can remember her Grandmother with the quilts. As such, she chooses to pass down the African-American cultural and artistic legacy to Maggie who will honour her 'foremothers'

## References

Women Writers Texts and Contexts: *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker. Ed. Barbara T. Christian. Rutgers University Press, 1994.

### 3.5 Interpreter of Maladies

*Jhumpa Lahiri*

#### 3.5.1 Sociocultural back ground of the Short Story

Migration of people across borders is very much a feature of modern times. Large numbers of people who migrate to other countries are described by the term ‘diaspora’. The dictionary defines diaspora as follows:

‘The movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland’

Increasingly there are many literary texts that deal with this phenomenon which is so characteristic of our times and Lahiri is an important writer in relation to this trend. All the stories in the collection ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ by Lahiri deal with characters who are from the diasporic community and the challenges and issues that they face.

#### 3.5.2 Introduction to the Author

‘Interpreter of Maladies’ by Jhumpa Lahiri is a short story in a collection of the same name. The collection published in 1999 consists of nine short stories. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award in the year 2000 and has sold over 15 million copies worldwide. Lahiri’s life has some interesting parallels with the characters that people her stories. Lahiri is a child of Bengali parents but was born in England. Later they moved to the United States and as a child Lahiri visited India many times. She is a second generation immigrant who has roots in many countries but also had ties to her country of origin, India. This is a fact that she talks about as having an influence on her writing:

It’s hard to have parents who consider another place “home”-even after living abroad for 30 years, India is home for them. We were always looking back so I never felt fully at home here. There’s nobody in this whole country that we’re related to. India was different-our extended family offered real connections.”

Yet despite her familial ties to India, Lahiri does not also identify India as “home”

“I didn’t grow up there, I wasn’t a part of things. We visited often but we didn’t have a home. We were clutching at a world that was never fully with us” (Interview with Vibhuti Patel in **Newsweek International**, 9-20-99). This notion of displacement and of exile is something that Lahiri experienced and identifies with and provides an inspiration to many of her stories. At a press conference in Calcutta in January of 2001, Lahiri notes that

“No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile in whichever country I travel to, that’s why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile”

### **3.5.3 Overview of the story**

The story deals with an Indian American diasporic family, specifically a Bengali-American family, the Das family who live in the United States. In the story, they have returned to India on a visit to understand and experience their country of origin. During their visit they make the acquaintance of Mr Kapasi who drives them to the various sites of cultural interest so that the Das family can get a better understanding of India. During their travel a friendship develops between Meena Das, the wife, and Mr Kapasi and the story suggest a growth in mutual understanding between these two which may continue even after Meena Das goes back to America. However a series of unfortunate incidents, springing largely from the fact that the Das family does not really understand the country they are visiting, brings this connection abruptly to a halt.

### **3.5.4 Structure and Setting**

The story set in India takes place during the course of one day. The major action takes place at an Indian tourist site of cultural significance. This setting is important because it functions as a symbol of the complications faced by the Das family as they engage/ encounter their cultural heritage.

### **3.5.5 Characterization**

The main characters in the story are Mr. Kapasi and the Das family — Meena, Raj and their three children. Later on in the story a group of monkeys also plays a key role in the events that unfold.

## **Mr Kapasi**

Mr Kapasi, in the story, plays a dual role as a tour guide as well as an interpreter to a doctor who needs his help to translate the complaints made by his patients. It is in his former capacity that he meets the Das family. Mr Kapasi has had many disappointments in his life and is now a disillusioned man. His dream has been to become an interpreter for diplomats, but has ultimately had no option but to settle for a mundane career after an unhappy marriage and the death of a son. When he accompanies the Indian-American Das family to see the Sun Temple of Konarak he is captivated by Mrs. Das. They share a momentary connection due to their dissatisfaction with their respective marriages. He develops a romantic obsession with Mrs Das which eventually leads to nothing.

## **Meena Das**

Both Meena and Raja are Americans of Indian descent with little or no previous acquaintance with the land of their ancestors. Mrs Das is portrayed as a bored unhappy woman who harbours a secret that could potentially ruin her family. She has fallen out of love with her husband and shows little affection for her three children.

## **Mr Das**

Mr Das on the other hands appears to be quite content with his life and children, and is oblivious to the unhappiness of his wife.

### **3.5.6 Techniques**

The tightly controlled point of view in the ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ is one of the most important techniques employed by the author in the narration of the story. It can be characterised as limited third person technique as all events unfold primarily as seen by Mr. Kapasi. We do not have access to the mind or the thoughts of the other main character in the story, Meena Das. At a very basic level only the events that are accessible to Mr Kapasi are mentioned. Furthermore it is important to note that Mr. Kapasi’s views of the Das family is filtered through his very limited understanding of Western culture. However these limitations on the part of Mr. Kapasi’s view point also allows the author to convey her negative impressions of the family relationships of the Das family and the futility of their superficial attempt to engage with their

Indian heritage. The point of view employed is also successful in conveying Mr. Kapasi's limitations as well, such as the absurdity of his infatuation with Meena Das.

### **3.5.7 Major Themes**

#### **Communication**

Lahiri's stories show the importance of communication in relationships. "Interpreter of Maladies" focuses on communication as one of the universal themes throughout the book. The stories demonstrate how communication is the key to the success or failure of relationships. In instances when communication is effectively employed characters are able to forge bonds that are intimate and enduring. The story also shows how communication which is superficial or ineffectual leads to negative consequences.

The importance of communication is evident in a very literal sense in that Mr Kapasi's job lies in his ability to communicate accurately the symptoms described by the patients at the medical clinic, who can speak only to Gujarati, to the doctor who does not understand the language. This suggests that maladies of a physical nature as well as those which are emotional depend on effective communication for a resolution.

The issues pertaining to the breakdown of communication is also explored in depth in the short story. The breakdown of the relationship between Meena and Raj appears due to the fact that they have stopped communicating with each other. This leads Meena to the extra marital relationship with her husband's friend, the consequences of which have the potential to disrupt her family. Mr Kapasi too shows an inability to communicate with his wife in his own marriage – the silence that grew out of resentment and blame over the death of their first child has led to a kind of stalemate between himself and his wife. On the whole, there appears to be little or no communication among the members of the Das Family, with each person doing what they wish. This is in fact observed by Mr Kapasi, and as the story progresses this disengagement leads to chaos and negative consequences in the incident where Bobby wanders off alone unsupervised and therefore gets into a confrontation with the monkeys. The possibilities that open up when real communication takes place is apparent in the unlikely friendship that develops between Meena and Mr Kapasi. Here they appear initially to be able to shed their cultural differences and communicate in a more open and honest level. In fact this connection leads to Meena making the

declaration that Bobby is not in fact Raj's son. However the brief promise of an enduring connection between the two parties is short lived as the cultural differences between them disrupts the tenuous connection that they establish. Mr Kapasi seeing the paper with his address written floating away indicates that the relationship is effectively over and that no further communication at even a very literal level can take place.

Closely linked to the notion of communication is **the importance of interpretation**. There are many hazards that are inherent in the act of interpretation. Mrs Das asks Mr Kapasi to interpret her problems and he is unable to do so. Similarly Meena wrongly interprets Mr Kapasi as she is clouded by her own worldview. She views his job as 'romantic' and confers a greater significance to his abilities than is true in reality. In turn Mr Kapasi allow himself to build a romantic day dream of Meena Das, flattered by her interest in him.

### **Identity**

Although the Das family is of Indian origin, they look like any other western tourist in their casual clothing and caps. It shows that they are visiting the country as outsiders which is evident in the fact that they constantly refer to maps and tourist guidebooks whenever they try to engage with this new setting. It is also problematic that for them "understanding: India is reduced to visiting ancient temples and other cultural monuments ". The inability to truly understand the country that they are visiting has darker undertones as well. By misreading and ignoring the environment around them Meena and Raj inadvertently create conditions that have the potential for disaster. The potential for great disruption is always present, in this case in the form of the monkeys who are harbingers of chaos.

### **Cultural differences**

The short story indicates that reconciling different identities is often difficult if not impossible. Cultural differences create a gap between The Das family and Mr Kapasi which seems too difficult to bridge. All attempts to bridge the divide appears to be futile; for example Mr Kapasi's reference to the soap opera *Dallas* which is his only access to American culture is pointless, as Meena and Raj, being much younger, have no knowledge of such a TV show. Mr Kapasi is also critical of what he sees as the family roles in the Das family. He is critical of the

little girl calling her mother by her first name. The story suggests therefore that the two worldviews ultimately cannot be reconciled. The attempts by Mr Kapasi and Mrs Das to get close to each other is at a more personal level, which is indeed affected by their perceptions (and misconceptions) of each other due to cultural differences.

While the cultural differences between Mr Kapasi and the Das family are quite obvious, perhaps even stereotypically presented by the writer, he and Mrs Das are able to forge a brief emotional connection. That the connection is destroyed almost as soon as it is made can be seen as the misconceptions of a more romantic nature on the part of Mr Kapasi. In the course of the journey in his car we see him becoming increasingly infatuated with the bored and restless Mrs Das, and he often misreads her actions as indications of her feelings for him, such as referring to his work as 'romantic', asking him to talk about his work, and asking him for his address to send him the photographs. We are not sure exactly what she feels about him, because as it is rightly pointed out in the discussion above, we read the story very much from Mr Kapasi's point of view. But she does make a confession to him of a secret, probably because she romanticises his job as an interpreter, and also, perhaps, because he is a random stranger she will probably never see again. Her confession results in the break of this tenuous connection, romantic on the part of Mr Kapasi, unclear on Mrs Das' part. Mr Kapasi is repulsed by her confession of what he calls "her common, trivial little secret", probably because he discovered that his romantic idol has feet of clay after all. His inability to comprehend the gravity of the secret she has harboured verges on the comic. His question to her after her confession comes across as extremely judgemental and unsympathetic ("Is it really pain you feel, or is it guilt?"), after mulling over what to say to her in an equally unimaginative fashion ("he would explain to her that honesty is the best policy"), which is also quite comic. Her body language afterwards, described by Mr Kapasi, suggests that she was more offended than hurt as she leaves the car to join her family.

### **3.5.8 Irony and Humour in the story**

The irony and humour in the story needs some mention. The portrayals of all the characters are tinged with comic irony – the way the Das family resemble stereotypical western tourists, Mr Kapasi's infatuation with and his romanticising of Mrs Das' actions, appearance and words, even his voyeuristic gaze upon her through the rear view mirror as he fantasises about her (He is quite lascivious in the way he keeps gazing at her, although this is conveyed with much subtlety by the

writer). It is at one level an extremely comic infatuation on his part, which the writer conveys in unadorned/unmediated descriptions of his thoughts and actions (how he imagines the progression of his letters to her, his imagined conversations with her ending with them possibly holding hands etc.). And rather than the cultural divide being a barrier, he is attracted to Mrs Das because of her difference – he finds her sexy and alluring unlike his wife who keeps her clothes on when they make love.

Also Mr Das, with his face perpetually in a guidebook, or behind the camera presents a rather comic image. The writer's touch is feather light, and her portrayal of both the local Indian and the Indian expatriates is ambiguous – we don't really know if she empathises with them or is laughing at them, probably a bit of both.

The richness of visual detail in the short story, from the appearances of the characters, to the descriptions of the terrain and the ancient temples they visit, should also be commented on.

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## 3.6 The Thing Around Your Neck

*Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

### 3.6.1. Socio-cultural background of the short story

Diaspora, a term that originated with the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel in 700 BCE, means, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland. It also refers to people who have spread or been dispersed from their homeland. Citing Robin Cohen (1997), John McLeod explains the term diasporas as follows: “communities of people living together in one country who ‘acknowledge that “the old country” – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions” (2000, 207). As McLeod adds, the practice of looking across time and space to another is a significant practice among such migrants, although there are generational differences among such migrants’ attitudes, culture and practices. The reasons for migration are manifold: British colonisation, study purposes; escape from political economic difficulties in their homelands and as family traditions. In the 20th century, mainly as a consequence of British colonisation and of the impact of globalisation, many populations from African and Asian settings migrate to European countries, especially to the UK, the USA and Australia. Hence, the experiences of living in a diaspora have been common issues in literature emerging from writers who have experienced migration.

*The Thing around Your Neck* appears in the short story collection bearing the same title, published in 2009. It is set with the backdrop of migration, particularly of Nigerians’ migration to the USA after winning the green card lottery -- a state lottery programme run by the US government for potential migrants to receive Permanent Resident status with employment in the United States.

### 3.6.2 Introduction to the author

Born in 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria to Igbo parents, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie grew up in one of the family’s ancestral houses in Nsukka where Chinua Achebe, the great Nigerian novelist and the author of widely-read African novel *Things Fall Apart*, also lived. Adichie’s father is a

Professor in Statistics and her mother a university registrar. Although Adichie initially studied medicine at a Nigerian university, she went to the USA at the age of 19 to study communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She then pursued a degree in Communication and Political Science at Eastern Connecticut State University and graduated in 2001. Then she completed her Masters in creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. She is the author of much-acclaimed and award-winning novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013). *The Thing around Your Neck* is a collection of 12 short stories which explores a variety of socio-cultural and political issues experienced by Nigerians residing both in Nigeria and/or in the USA.

### **3.6.3. Overview of the short story**

A young Nigerian girl, Akunna, after winning a visa (Green Card) to the USA leaves her home country, for studies, to live in the USA. She goes there with full of ‘unrealistic’ expectations of the new country and of the people living in the USA, especially of Nigerians living in America. Accordingly, she leaves Nigeria to live with her uncle in Maine. She expects a ‘home’ in the USA at her uncle’s place. Yet, she finds that her attempt to assimilate into the neighbourhood is not easy and her uncle’s place is not a home. One night, she is subjected to sexual assault by her uncle. Consequently she leaves her uncle’s place and finds meagre work in a restaurant in Connecticut. She feels isolated and lonely, yet she becomes independent. She never writes to her family in Nigeria, yet sends money home. She does not tell them where she lives, or her address. Later, the young man - a customer who gradually becomes her lover - offers her affection and belongingness. She feels happy and writes to her mother revealing her return address. Her mother tells her that her father has died five months ago, and she has used the money Akunna sent to give the father a ‘good funeral’. Finally, she leaves America to go to Nigeria, ignoring the lover’s question – “would you come back?”, and not responding to his reminder about the ‘value’ of the green card.

### **3.6.4. Issues and themes**

A broad theme explored in the story is socio-cultural effects of migration - migrant experiences, especially Nigerians’ experiences in the USA - their attempts in assimilating into the host culture and their return to the home culture, by crossing space and time. Many migrants assume that

their lives will be successful once they arrive in the USA; they will be warmly welcome by their relatives and will be easily assimilated into the host culture and so on, as represented in the following:

You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so, too. Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don't buy a gun like those Americans. (p. 115).

Winning a visa to the USA is a dream for some people. It is, as they believe, a journey towards success and prosperity and freedom. Adichie explores how that dream world is shattered in reality. Incorporated in such broad themes are the issues related to family and exile. Alienation from comforting surroundings is also explored in the story.

What is also striking is the protagonist's perseverance and courage amidst such psychological and material barriers. "America was give-and-take" is another aspect explored in the short story, especially through the encounter between the girl and her uncle. Although he offers her food, lodging, he expects in-return to fulfil his sexual desires with her even by force. Thus, the girl's departure from America alludes to the uncle's 'lesson' to her; he says that understanding America is a "trick" – "it is give-and-take" (this can be considered as a 'trick' used by the uncle to seduce Akunna).

The story also highlights the 'cultural vacuum' experienced by migrants: it is created through their failure to assimilate into the new culture and their divorce/dislocation from the native culture. Moreover, the fundamental inequalities in the relationship can also be considered as an issue explored in the story; for instance, the relationship between the rich, upper class liberal white boyfriend and his struggling immigrant girlfriend from Nigeria. The dynamics of an interracial relationship, sexual exploitation and abuse by the uncle, social and emotional isolation of Akunna are also issues presented in the story.

### **3.6.5 Techniques**

The second person narrative style is employed in the story to capture readers' attention and to involve them in the experiences depicted through the protagonist. The second person narrative

style may also create some effects on the characters: as the 'you' is addressed to Akunna, it may create a tone of accusation.

“He held you while you cried, smoothed your hair, and offered to buy your ticket, to go with you to see your family. You said no, you needed to go alone”.

The title – the thing around your neck -- is found two times in the story: “At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep” and “The thing that wrapped itself around your neck, that nearly choked you before you fell asleep, started to loosen, to let go”. The title signifies the psychological and physical suffocation experienced by the girl, through 'the thing' around the neck. It may allude to the night and the incident of her uncle's sexual assault. It may also represent the efforts she takes to deal with the reality of homesickness, her attempts of assimilation into the new culture. One may even argue that it may also symbolise the greener pastures she and her people around her in Nigeria (“uncles and aunts and cousins thought so”) expected in the USA when she left Nigeria. Then the thing around her neck refers to unrealistic expectations that Akunna had, prior to her arrival in America.

### **3.6.6 Structure and setting**

The story is revealed through the second person perspective, by using the second person pronoun “you” throughout to refer to the protagonist of the story. This device, above all, allows readers to be a part of the protagonist, and hence to understand her experiences well and to empathise with the character. It is also useful to draw and sustain readers' attention. The continuous use of the word 'you' also reminds us of the oral tradition of storytelling in African culture. As Solomon Iyasere states “the modern African writer is to his [and her] indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind (1975, 107, as cited in “African Storytelling”). Adichie thus seems remind her readers of the significance of storytelling through the use of second person narrative. Besides, the story is narrated chronologically except for the narratives of the past. The setting, first is in Maine in America until she arrives in Connecticut in America to start working at the restaurant. However, as the protagonist crosses the boundaries of time and space in her narratives and in her thoughts, readers are drawn to the largest city in Nigeria, Lagos as well, where her father works as a driver.

### **3.6.7. Characterisation**

#### **Akunna**

She is the protagonist of the story who arrives in the USA with many expectations, to climb up the social ladder through education, to reach economic stability, to help her people back in home. Although she is welcome by her uncle and teaches her the lessons about the culture in America initially, she is on the verge of being subjected to his sexual assault. Akunna is confident and brave as she takes a decision to leave him and to be independent. The way she finds her job at the restaurant, although she is exploited by the owner as he pays her low salary, demonstrates her courage and perseverance. She is helpful, and generous to her family in Nigeria: she sends money regularly to her family in Nigeria even though she finds it difficult to live with the salary, and by sacrificing her initial desire for education in the USA. She does not write to her family in Nigeria first as her dreams are shattered, as her uncle has exploited her. Thus she seems a person who is not willing to share her grievances with others, even with her family members. Even though she is happy when she is with her lover, she experiences a vacuum in her; this may be due to her inability to fit into the new culture. Thus, she lives in-between – in America and Nigeria by crossing space and time. This comes to a climax when she gets to know the death of her father in Nigeria and departs America.

#### **Uncle**

Akunna's uncle, although not related by blood to her, belongs to the first generation of immigrants, those who have already migrated and now settled in the USA. He tells Akunna that America's strategy is "give and take". He initially helps Akunna by giving her accommodation, helping her to find a job and by describing American culture for her to understand it and so on. Yet, he attempts to fulfil his sexual needs through Akunna. This attempt may be read in relation to the strategy – "give and take".

The symbolic reference – the thing around the neck – is a direct reference to the psychological and physical trauma experienced by Akunna's due to Uncle's attempt of sexual abuse, as implied in the title and in the several references to it in the story. Thus, although the uncle plays a minor

role in the short story, appearing only in the first part of the text, the Uncle's invisible and subtle impact on Akunna's life and on the plot of the story is significant and pervasive.

### **Akunna's lover**

The unnamed boyfriend of Akunna is an affluent white American from the East coast, which suggests social and economic privilege. However, this aspect is only hinted at in the story. Unlike many people, he seems to understand and empathise with Akunna. The author may have introduced this character as a point of contrast to the Uncle. In contrast to uncles, he does not follow give and take motif. He offers many materialistic gifts to Akunna, without getting anything in return. He goes to many restaurants with her and buys food and beverages for her. He attempts to fill Akunna's cultural emptiness. It is because of his love and concern that Akunna feels that the thing that wrapped itself around her neck, which nearly choked her, has started to loosen. Yet, he is unable to fill the vacuum created in Akunna permanently, partly because they live in a society which follows both explicit and implicit racism; for instance, the waiter at the restaurant, even though he has witnessed the intimate relationship between Akunna and her lover, does not accept that Akunna can be the lover of the white boy. Akunna's lover also thinks that the Green Card offered to such immigrants, are much valuable to Nigerians, as represented through the end of the story.

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## 3.7 Action and Reaction by Chitra Fernando

### 3.7.1 The author

Chitra Fernando was born in Kalutara and graduated from the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya in 1959 with an Honours degree in English. She joined the academic staff of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya as a Temporary Assistant Lecturer in the department of English in 1960. Winning a scholarship to the University of Sydney in 1961, she obtained an MA (Hons) degree for her thesis titled “*A Constructive Study of English and Sinhala Grammar*” in 1963. Qualified as an MA degree holder, she returned to Sri Lanka and worked at the Department of Education, Sri Lanka until 1968. Then she was appointed as a Lecturer in Linguistics at Macquarie University where she also started working on a doctoral thesis on the *Nature and Function of Idiom* in 1972. She completed her thesis in 1981. In the meantime, she published five volumes of stories for Sri Lankan children in the “Taprobane Readers” series, under the pseudonym “Chitrlekha”. The backdrop to all these stories is Sri Lanka. Some of her published articles are on attitudes and language in Ceylonese/Sri Lankan creative writing (1973), and on “*English and Sinhala Bilingualism in Sri Lanka*” (1976). She published *Three Women* (1984), *Between Worlds* (1988) and four other works of short fiction, and a monograph on *Idiom* in collaboration with Roger Flavell. She started writing her novel *Cousins*, in 1989 working simultaneously on the publication of her PhD thesis titled *Idioms and Idiomacity*. Although her thesis was published by Oxford University Press, in 1996, her novel *Cousins* was only posthumously published in 1999, as she succumbed to a bone marrow cancer in Sydney in 1998. Chitra Fernando’s works seem to be influenced, first by the Buddhist-cultural setting in Sri Lanka, then by the insights gained by her exposure to the different cultures of the world, third, by her knowledge of linguistics.

### Chitra Fernando’s collection of short fiction, *Three Women* (1984)

The three stories in *Three Women* are:

- Missilin
- Action and Reaction
- Of Bread and Power

- Approaches to the reading of *Three Women* can be twofold:
- as a collection of three distinct individual stories on the plight of three different women
- as a whole where interrelated issues are gradually elaborated and fused together to disclose common concerns encountered by women – exploitation and emancipation.

All the stories are woven round Sri Lankan women characters, critically exploring the aspects of exploitation encountered by these female characters.

- Thus, *Three Women* is a portrait of female victims doubly victimized – primarily by females, then by traditional middle-class values encouraged in society.
- *Action and Reaction* echoes some issues and characters presented in the other two stories, thus, contributing to the development of characterization and structure of the entire book.

**Characters in *Three Women* can be compared as follows:**

- Missilin is a portrayal of a household female servant and the way she is subtly exploited by her mistress, Mrs. Ranasinghe who is respected as a pious woman in society.
- Echoing the characteristics of Mrs. Ranasinghe, *Loku Nanda* in *Action and Reaction* also exploits Kusuma, the adopted child cum servant.
- Missilin never resents her employer, but Kusuma replicates *Loku Nanda's* exploitation when *Loku Nanda* is physically feeble.
- While Missilin seems to receive the readers' sympathy towards her, Kusuma may receive the readers' antipathy in *Action and Reaction*, for readers may feel sympathetic to *Loku Nanda's* plight towards the end of the story.
- Seela in *Of Bread and Power* becomes the exploited due to the values upheld by her parents. However, unlike Missilin and Kusuma, Seela seems to find an escape from her exploitation by leaving her parents.
- *Three Women* unfolds a two-fold facet of the exploitation of women a process of exploitation experienced by women and a gradual journey towards an escape from exploitation - emancipation.

- Missilin was subtly exploited but she never reacted against Mrs Ranasinghe, and thus continues to receive the readers' sympathy.
- Kusuma gradually and astutely becomes the exploiter, replicating the role of Loku Nanda.
- Seela leaves her parents' exploitation and seems to find comfort in life with the help of another female character, her grandmother.
- Unlike the first two stories, *Of Bread and Power* reveals not only the victimisation experienced by females but how they liberate themselves from exploitation: it foreshadows female emancipation. Unlike the first two stories, *Of Bread and Power* shows the sincere virtue and piety explained in Buddhism. Grandmother extends kindness to all human beings while Seela remains generous to her family.
- If one reads this *three-ply* fiction as a whole, s/he can understand its interrelatedness in structure and gradual development in characterization. However, each story also shows the predicament of different female characters in Sri Lankan society.

### 3.7.2 Plot summary of *Action and Reaction*

The story of *Action and Reaction* is narrated by a male character in the story named Mahinda, who is also the nephew of one major female character of the story, *Loku Nanda*. The story opens with Mahinda's childhood memories of *Loku Nanda*, living in a village named Payagala in the southern area of Sri Lanka. *Loku Nanda* is an unmarried woman, living alone in a large house owned by her. She is rich, and as the narrator says "she had everything she wanted". *Loku Nanda* says that her "constant guide" in life is the *Karmic Law*. Mahinda relates how she observes the five precepts. Society – everyone in the village and all her relations – respect and honour her for her piety and generosity and her behavior. She adopts a small girl (but "not as a daughter") called Kusuma and teaches her crocheting and household chores but not reading and writing. Although *Loku Nanda* says that she would "arrange a marriage for Kusuma at the right time", she never keeps her promise. Unmarried Kusuma continues to live with *Loku Nanda* following the path of *Loku Nanda's* meritorious acts. As the narrator says, *Loku Nanda* is pleased with Kusuma and has given Kusuma the charge of the house. The story ends with the narrator's (as a post-doctoral student) visit to Payagala: *Loku Nanda* is physically paralyzed

while Kusuma is busy running the house and doing all the meritorious acts, even selling some ebony furniture inherited by *Loku Nanda* and *Loku Nanda*'s jewellery.

### 3.7.3 Themes/issues

- **Piety vs. iniquity**

The story subtly reveals how people's piety is beaten by their iniquity. The author repeatedly brings in the narrator's ironical description of *Loku Nanda – the practical woman* - to indicate *Loku Nanda*'s hypocrisy, the dual role she plays between her piousness and wickedness. In the first part of the story, *Loku Nanda*'s actions display both piety and iniquity. However, the motives behind most of her pious actions are deeply and primarily rooted in her self-centred longings. When *Loku Nanda* is physically feeble and dominated by Kusuma, in the latter part of the story, *Loku Nanda* seems to have reduced her iniquity, receiving readers' sympathy towards her.

- **Religious practices in society**

Religious principles are blindly practised in society, perhaps to suit the needs and desires of people. The story sarcastically discloses how some of those so called meritorious acts are practised to gain *social prestige* and *power*:

Examples

- *Loku Nanda* donates a loudspeaker to publicize her piety
- *Loku Nanda* puts up the *best* pirith mandape to compete with another woman in the village
- *Punchi Nanda* hides the truth of the *mandape* to maintain some power and to

These practices reveal that even by being involved in religious acts people try to be competitive and to hurt others. Thus, the story is a subtle critique of such blind religious practices and people's ignorance of Buddhist principles.

- **The tile Action and Reaction**

Newton's Laws of Motion explains "for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Newton's theory when incorporated into human science can be interpreted as "what one sows one reaps". In Buddhism, this is explained in a different way - through *Karma* and *Vipaka*. *Karma* is action, and *Vipaka* is its reaction or result. *Karma* may be either good actions or bad actions; similarly, *Vipaka* also may be good results or bad results. What Loku Nanda strongly believes in, is this *Karma* and *Vipaka* - *Karmic Law*: she seems to lead her life accordingly. However, the irony is that she succumbs to her "bad" actions as presented in the latter part of the story.

(\*Although Loku Nanda seems to believe that every *Vipaka* is due to *Karma*, Buddhism teaches *Karma* as only one among many other causes).

- **'Danaparamitha' the Perfection of Giving**

Fernando very subtly showcases how profound religious insights and values are wrongly interpreted to achieve personal, selfish, superficial goals of individuals. She skilfully juxtaposes the real Buddhist principle of *Giving* and how it is interpreted by individuals in society (it is juxtaposed through the monk's sermon and meritorious acts of both *Loku Nanda* and *Kusuma*) Similar to *Missilin* where Mrs. Ranasinghe pays for an almsgiving to her servant in order to feel virtuous and to enjoy the "worldly fruits" of her acts, both *Loku Nanda* and *Kusuma* spend much money for temple buildings (shrine room, bana hall) to collect meritorious deeds. Expecting more in return, especially in the next birth. But the correct explanation of *Giving* is explained by the Buddhist monk during his sermon, quoting an example from The Tathagatha, the Bodhisathva. Accordingly perfection in giving is generosity expecting nothing in return, except enlightenment hurt the other donator.

- **"Ditta Dhamma Vedaniya Kamma "**

From a Buddhist point of view, our present mental and physical experiences are, predominantly, caused by our own actions and tendencies rooted both in our past birth and in the present. *Ditta dhamma vedaneeya kamma* explains how human beings' actions committed in this

birth reacts/results in the same birth. In the story we see that *Loku Nanda* ill-treats and manipulates Kusuma to satisfy her own desires and needs. When she is old, she ends her life as a paralyzed, feeble and sympathetic character dominated by Kusuma's actions. The exploiter becomes the exploited during the course of the story proving the Buddhist teachings - *Ditta Dhamma Vedaneeya Kamma*.

Professor Nandasena Ratnapala's research study investigated the lives and the deaths of 48 people in Sri Lanka. Employing a sociological methodology - observation and interview – he supports his hypothesis that if one is involved in violent activities such as killing another animal/human being cruelly and brutally, s/he too will experience the same brutal violence in the same birth.

- **Child Adoption**

The General understanding of child adoption is taking another person's child into one's family and raising him/her as one's own child. However, before the laws of child adoption were implemented in Sri Lanka, child adoption was commonly and in different ways practised in traditional affluent families. Fernando in *Action and Reaction* very subtly explores one aspect of child adoption in traditional societies in the past in Sri Lanka. She critically raises questions such as:

- Who adopts children?
- What motives lie behind adoption?
- What exactly is the relationship between the adopted child and the guardian?
- What is the role of the adopted?
- What is the future of the adopted?

### 3.7.4 Characterization

#### Loku Nanda

Loku Nanda, a middle aged woman who has been denied rejected the traditional family life, is one of the co-protagonists of the story. Her life style is influenced by her belief and her understanding of the Buddhist principle - *karmic law*. According to her point of view, all good actions will be rewarded whereas all bad actions will be punished. However, her understanding, of good and bad deeds seems to be centered on her self-centered motives.

Readers see a clear development in the characterization of Loku Nanda. While Fernando begins the story disclosing Loku Nanda's hypocrisy behind her piousness, readers' attitude towards her changes with the development of the story: Mahinda's description of *Loku Nanda* gradually draws the readers' sympathy towards her.

#### Kusuma

She is brought to Loku Nanda's house when she is 12 years old, to be adopted, not as a daughter but as a servant. Loku Nanda takes care of her, providing food, shelter, clothes and some other needs. It says that Loku Nanda even saves some money in Kusma's account. In return, Kusuma does all household chores at Loku Nanda's place and receives the skill of crocheting. Loku Nanda never teaches her reading and writing. Loku Nanda's constant guide in life – *karmic law* is manifested through Kusuma becomes a replica of Loku Nanda when Kusuma establishes a certain power at Loku Nanda's place.

#### Examples

- becomes a blind follower of religious practices
- dominates *Loku Nanda* by being involved in donations to the temple, without even accepting Loku Nanda's contribution to the meritorious acts
- Loku Nanda, illtreating her with meager food
- Overpowers Loku Nanda collecting money for meritorious deeds at Loku Nanda's expense.

Readers see a materialistically positive development in Kusuma's character while her humanity seems to have deteriorated: Kusuma attempts to collect merit even at Loku Nanda's expense, never allowing Loku Nanda to contribute to the meritorious deeds, selling even *Loku Nanda's* property, treating Loku Nanda in a mean way. Perhaps, on one hand, Fernando tries to create a woman character that is worse than Mrs. Ransinghe and Loku Nanda: Kusuma seems to exceed Loku Nanda, both in "wrong" acts of piety and in exploitation. However, on the other hand, Kusuma is more pathetic than Loku Nanda and Mrs. Ransinghe: Kusuma being an illiterate woman leads her life according to Loku Nanda's guidance; Kusuma's ignorance of Buddhist principles is the result of Loku Nanda's teaching. Thus readers may take pity on Kusuma.

### **Mahinda**

Mahinda is the omniscient narrator of the story. He is the nephew of *Loku Nanda*, a co-protagonist of the story. Parallel to the development of the story, readers see Mahinda's physical and intellectual development throughout the story. At the outset, Mahinda seems to *believe* every thing the society told him about Loku Nanda. But gradually with his exposure to events outside Payagala and with his exposure to the world through his graduation and education, his thoughts become more logical: he gains clear insight into the relationship between Loku Nanda and Kusuma. At the end of the story Mahinda seems to sympathize with Loku Nanda but he never takes any action to help Loku Nanda's plight. Mahinda, thus, ends up being a person who is critically aware of exploitation and hypocrisy coated with piousness. He, nevertheless, remains the silent observer who takes no action against injustice and hypocrisy.

### **Mala, Mahinda's sister**

Although she is seemingly a minor character, her voice seems to represent the younger generation who might have protested against the exploitation experienced by women characters. Although her shrewd childhood attempt to accompany Kusuma to Colombo is primarily a selfish act, although her company with Kusuma is to show off her wit, she joins Mahinda to speak for Kusuma expressing the idea that marriage is a right of Kusuma's, but, neither Mala nor Mahinda succeed in convincing others. Perhaps, a mature description of this girl is depicted as Seela in *Of Bread and Power*.

### **Punchi Nanda, Mother, Father and other people**

Although their voices are not frequently heard, they contribute a lot to the development of the story and of the narrators' thoughts. Their voices show the thinking of a cross-section of society in general, especially, a cross-section of traditional village folks whose lives are influenced by Buddhist practices. Mahinda says that he believes in what others say about *Loku Nanda*. All these people accept *Loku Nanda's* actions: they seem ignorant of hypocrisy underneath *Loku Nanda's* meritorious acts. Fernando, throughout the story, seems to juxtapose the voice of these people and of Mahinda and Mala to indicate the difference between prejudiced thoughts influenced by traditional practices in the village and more rational thoughts influenced by, according to *Loku Nanda*, "foreign ideas" of Freud, Marx, book learning and other cultures.

#### **3.7.5. Narrative techniques**

Chitra Fernando has employed one of the characters (Mahinda) of the story to narrate the relationship between the two main characters - Loku Nanda and Kusuma. The narrative technique used by the author makes the story significant in two main ways.

First, Fernando's employment of a character that is neither too close to the protagonists nor too distant from the protagonists adds reliability to the characterization of the story. Mahinda's narration is also developed through minor characters' views as well. That is, Mahinda always substantiates his narration bringing in the opinions of society, represented by his father, mother and Punchi Nanda of the story. This technique helps the author to authenticate the narrators' voice.

Secondly, readers notice Mahinda's development as a narrator, his reasoning ability in drawing the portrait of Loku Nanda and Kusuma. Being an adult narrator, Mahinda, at the outset of the story, is seen recalling his memories of Loku Nanda: Through these, he describes how other adults around him like his parents influenced him to create a virtuous impression of Loku Nanda in him. He shows the influence of his mother and father too. However, through Mahinda's omniscient, unbiased narration, the readers are able to understand Loku Nanda without being prejudiced by the comments of others.

The development of Mahinda's character is presented through the following stages of his life:

- As a small boy when he is exposed only to Payagala and to his relatives in the village
- As a teenager – when he is exposed to his peers
- As a university-entrance student being exposed to Colombo and outside Payagala
- As a university student
- As a postgraduate student outside Sri Lanka and with his education
- As a postdoctoral student outside Sri Lanka with his post doctoral experience

Mahinda's physical development coincides with his understanding of the character of Loku Nanda and her actions. It is very significant in the story as it really deals with the understanding of the main issues of the story – *karmic law*, piety and iniquity simultaneously existent in human beings in different quantities, as a result of their limited understanding of religion.

### **3.7.6 Language in 'Action and Reaction'**

The short fiction *Three Women* was published in 1984 when the awareness of different varieties of English, *World Englishes*<sup>1</sup>, particularly in post colonial countries was limited. Many Sri Lankans too were, negative about the variety of *Sri Lankan English*<sup>2</sup>. However, in all three short stories the language used by Fernando is very specific to Sri Lankans in many respects. They are used to indicate:

- Kinship terms such as Loku Nanda, Punched Nanda
- Buddhist practices and principles such as Pirith, Bana, Mandape, sansara, karmic law, pinvethuni, dayaka, thanha
- Employments such as toddy tapper, Martin Mudalali' skade
- Appearance, such as konde
- Food such as varaka
- Common expressions such as

“You eat a mountain of rice everyday”

“Why don’t you get yourself a wife? Then she can cook for you”.

Her choice of language, especially the expressions and lexis related to Sri Lankans and Buddhism, may have helped her to draw a realistic portrait of these women and some societal values.

### 3.7.7 Questions

**Teaching may be developed through the following signpost questions:**

- What is the setting of the story?
- Who are the main characters of the story?
- Write character sketches of them.
- What Buddhist practices/principles are mentioned in the story?
- Have you experienced such hypocrisy in the name of religion in society? What are they?
- Who is the narrator of the story?
- Trace the physical and intellectual development in the narrators’ life.
- What kind of a narrator is he? Is he omniscient/ unbiased...? Justify your answer.
- List the meritorious acts of Loku Nanda? (eg. donating a loudspeaker, adopting Kusuma, teaching Kusuma crocheting etc.)
- Try to identify the motives behind these meritorious actions. (e.g. she donated the loudspeaker to publicize her piety )
- Why does the writer repeatedly mention that Loku Nanda “is a *practicalwoman*”?

- What is the turning point of the story?
- When do Kusuma and Loku Nanda change their roles?
- Why did *Loku Nanda* give Kusuma power to run her home?
- Do you feel sorry for Kusuma/Loku Nanda? Give reasons for your answer.
- “Mahinda is only a passive observer of Loku Nanda’s world”. Discuss.
- Imagine you are Mahinda in the story, what actions would you take to prevent the process of victimisation presented in the story? Justify your actions.
- Do you notice any significance in Fernando’s use of language in the story? What are they? Are they helpful to her to present the story?

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# Poetry

## 4.1 Introduction to Poetry

### 4.1.1 What is poetry?

- The poem is a capsule where we wrap up our punishable secrets (William Carols Williams)
- A poem is a well- wrought urn( Cleanth Books)
- A verbal icon (W.K. Wimsatt)
- A poem is a walk ( A.R. Ammons)
- A poem is a meteor (Wallace Stevens)
- A poem might be called a pseudo person.(Gerald B Nelson)
- Like a person it is unique and address the reader personally( W.H. Auden)
- A poem is a hand, a hook, a prayer. It is soul in action (Edward Hirsch)

The various statements given above by poets and poetry critics suggest the difficulty one faces in defining poetry. As Murfin and Ray (1997) argue, ‘there are as many ways to characterize poetry as there are people. The word poetry originates from the Greek word ‘poiesis’, which means ‘making’ and as the ancient Greeks recognized, the poet is first and foremost a ‘maker’. It suggests that there is no contradiction between the truth that poetry is somehow or other inspired and, simultaneously, an art (techne), a craft requiring a blend of talent, training, and long practice. But the ‘made thing’ has magical potency. What Picasso said about painting being more than an aesthetic operation is equally true of poetry. According to him, ‘ art is a form of magic designed as a mediator between this strange, hostile world and us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires’.

### 4.1.2 History of poetry

Poetry has long and illustrious history. Many of the earliest literary and often religious works are poems. At the beginning poetry was a collective construction as is witnessed by the folk ballad and religious hymns – it played a major role in religious and other ceremonial functions. It

also helped to preserve history and traditions. This information was often passed orally from generation to generation. This situation changed over time. Poetry became the vehicle for drama and then for individual expression. Today poetry is seen as a highly individualistic endeavour. Actually no other form of expression is as intensely personal and unique as poetry.

#### **4.1.3 Poetry and Prose**

Poetry is often distinguished from prose. There is an obvious difference in form. A deeper difference is that the meaning of a prose passage can be easily restated while the meaning of a poem cannot be so easily paraphrased. 'While poetry can be approached intellectually, it is equally an emotional experience (Murfin and Ray, 1997) unlike prose which is meant to be read, poetry is meant to be experienced. Poetry is not exact; neither is it factual. It is rich with a suggestiveness born from the interplay of words and sounds. The suggestive essence of poetry means that poets commonly make use of figurative language and symbolism. Poetry uses tropes as well as figures of speech that enhances both the imagery and the sensory impact of the poem. The connotations of words and the relationships among words, phrases, and ideas all add to the purely denotative meanings of the poet's language. Furthermore, auditory elements – the sound and rhythms of letters words, phrases and lines – are key aspects of the poem and play a large role in how the poem is read and understood.

The language of poetry also distinguishes it from prose. Prose is often discursive. Poetry uses language economically. The brevity of poetic expression in contrast to prose affords it a particular intensity.

#### **4.1.4 Poetry and verse.**

As poetry is different from prose, it is also different to verse – any rhythmical or metrical composition. Poetry is distinguished from verse by virtue of its imaginative quality, intricate structure, serious or lofty subject matter or noble purpose.

#### **4.1.5 Poetic 'Genres'**

With its long history originating in religious ritual and tribal narrative, poetry has taken many forms and acquired many features. To put poetry into a historical perspective, it seems to be rational to begin with the ballad.

## Ballad

“A poem that recounts a story- generally some dramatic episode – and that has been composed to be sung”. The traditional ballad is also known as the popular or folk ballad. Ballads may address noble subjects such as tragic love. They were sung by common people and hence employ simple language. The traditional ballads most frequently sung were found in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Britain.

Popular ballads were passed down orally from one generation to the next. This oral transmission results in ongoing and continuous modification so that many variations occur in the ballad over time and across geographical space. The tradition of oral transmission from generation to generation has made the folk ballad the common property of the community.

The traditional or folk ballad exhibits the following features:

- i. Simple stanzas** (ballad stanzas)
- ii. Abrupt transitions between stanzas** due to weakverses that have been dropped.
- iii. Refrains which often include a nonsense line** that perhaps occurred during oral transmission
- iv. Stock descriptive phrases to facilitate memorization**
- v. Incremental repetition: a restatement of a phrase or line with a variation that adds additional information or meaning**
- vi. Dialogue:** used to create character and advance the story line.
- vii. Impersonal language:** that keeps out the singer’s personal feelings / judgement about the ballad’s content.

Beside the traditional ballad, there are also broadside ballads and literary ballads.

## Sonnet

“Is a lyric poem that almost always consists of fourteen lines? The word had originated from the Italian word *sonnetto*, meaning “little song”. It follows one of several conventional rhyme

schemes. A sonnet may address a range of issues or themes but love is the most prevalent. Two major types of sonnets exist: the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespeare or English sonnet. The Italian sonnet has fourteen lines and consists of two parts, an octave (eight lines) with a rhyme scheme of abbaabba and a sestet or six lines usually rhyming cdecde or cdcdcd.

The Shakespearean sonnet also has fourteen lines, with three quatrains followed by a couplet, with a rhyme scheme of ababcdcdefefgg. The Spenserian is a variation of the Shakespearean sonnet.

The sonnet was introduced to English poetry in the sixteenth century by Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey.

## **Ode**

A long, serious, and usually meditative lyric poem that treats a noble or elevated subject in a dignified manner. There were two types of odes:

1. Pindaric odes were heroic and exalted the subject with extreme praise.
2. Horatian odes were more detached, and balanced with criticism.

The origin of the ode can be traced to Pindar. It was a Choral poem intended to be sung at a public event. Originally, odes had a three stanzaic form.

- (a) strophe
- (b) anti – strophe
- (c) epode

The strophe is the first part of a choral ode in which the Chorus chanted while moving from one part of the stage to another, usually from the right to the left. The Antistrophe was the reverse movement when the Chorus walked from the left to the right. This was followed by the Epode which was chanted while standing still. The strophe and anti – strophe exhibited the same meter which was different from that of epode.

In the classical ode, the antistrophe offered an alternative comment to the subject presented in the strophe. The epode usually offered a concluding comment.

## Lyric

A *song* in Greek. ‘The lyric is one of the oldest, most popular and enduring forms of literary expression in the English language’. It is the lyric that later diversified into ballad, sonnet and ode. Even in diversification, the lyric had retained its original characteristics.

- (a) subjective expression of thought and emotion
- (b) the individualistic and imaginative focus
- (c) melodic tone

The term *lyric* derives from the Greek work for lyre and refers to any poem composed to be sung while accompanied by a lyre.

Today a lyric is a brief melodic and imaginative poem, characterized by a fervent but structured expression of private thoughts and emotions by a single speaker who speaks in first person.

### 4.1.6 Language in poetry

According to Coleridge, poetry is the arrangement of the best words in the best order. Widdowson (1983) puts it much more elaborately when he says.

“When word is worked into the language patterns of poems it takes on meaning as a feature of their design. Just as familiar and commonplace objects become a part of the configuration of colour and form in a painting and so acquire a particular significance, the word takes on a different value in the unique frame of reference created by the internal patterns of language within the poem.”

More detailed comments on language can be found in the guides to individual poems in this text.

## 4.2 Sonnet 73

### William Shakespeare

#### 4.2.1 Socio – cultural back ground of the poem

Sonnet 73 is one of the sonnets known as the sonnets to the Fair Youth. The Fair Youth poems are expressions of spiritual love towards a young man. These sonnets range from sonnet 1 – 126.

Shakespearean sonnets are different to the Petrarchan sonnets mainly with their rhyme scheme. The Rhyme pattern is abab cdcd efef gg with the final couplet used to summarize the previous 12 lines or present a surprise ending. Similar to the Petrarchan sonnet, the rhythmic pattern in the iambic pentameter.

#### 4.2.2 Introduction to the author

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, dramatist and an actor widely recognised as one of the greatest writers in English. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and studied in the local grammar school till his marriage to Anne Hathaway at the age of 18. After the birth of his children, Shakespeare is believed to have fled his hometown to work in London while some believe he was fleeing home to escape an unhappy marriage.

Shakespeare is believed to have been a prolific writer, producing not only plays but sonnets, poems while being an actor as well. He is believed to have been the house playwright for King's Men till about 1613 and then is believed to have retired, due to Bubonic Plague affecting London and his family affairs. He died suddenly in 1616 and was survived by his wife and daughters. He was buried at the Holy Trinity church in Stratford-upon-Avon where he was baptised 52 years ago. His works have been reinterpreted and adapted over the ages, once again asserting his timeless versatility that enables even the modern audiences/ readers to find familiarity in his works.

#### 4.2.3 Overview of the poem

Through this sonnet, the poet laments his passing youth and notices how his youth is fading fast. His worry about his age and his inadequacy in terms of his age as compared to his youthful

lover are expressed through the references to twilight, black night and death. In the couplet he appreciates the lover's dedication and appreciation of him, despite his age and passing youth.

#### **4.2.4 Structure and style**

The poem is written in a sonnet form and follows the abab cdcd efef gg. The three quatrains describe the poet's realisation about his fading youth. The final couplet establishes the poet's appreciation of his lover's attachment to him and insinuates the spiritual attachment between his lover and him, which is beyond mere physical attachment.

#### **4.2.5 Techniques**

This uses the style of a sonnet to deliver the message of the poet's spiritual attachment to his lover. The use of the final couplet ushers in the final denouement to the sonnet; the poet's appreciation of his lover and his attachment.

#### **4.2.6 Issues and themes**

One of the main issues addressed in the sonnet is the inevitability of death and the passing of age. The theme of youth that passes and the slow ascend towards death is heightened through the sonnet. The final couplet reasserts the spiritual nature of the poet's love towards his lover and his appreciation of the love he receives.

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<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/collections/?gclid=CJ3WqYil7NICFQdxvAodJ6oLIQ> Accessed on 23/03/17

## 4.3 Sonnet 141

### William Shakespeare

#### 4.3.1 Socio – cultural back ground of the poem

Sonnet 141 is one of the sonnets known as the sonnets to the Dark Lady. The Dark Lady poems are considered to be more explicit in the expression of physical love. Dark Lady sonnets are compared to the Fair Youth sonnets which describe spiritual love and are written to a young man in contrast to the dark haired lady mentioned in the Dark Lady sonnets ranging from sonnet 127-154.

Shakespearean sonnets are different to the Petrarchan sonnets mainly with their rhyme scheme. The Rhyme pattern is abab cdcd efef gg with the final couplet used to summarize the previous 12 lines or present a surprise ending. Similar to the Petrarchan sonnet, the rhythmic pattern in the iambic pentameter.

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### 4.3.3 Overview of the poem

This sonnet describes a lover's confession to his beloved. The sonnet describes the infatuation towards the Dark Lady and the sensual pleasures derived from this relationship. According to the poet, the lady is full of faults, but despite these faults, he cannot stop being attracted to her. He finds her attractive not through the use of his five senses (vision, taste, touch, aural, smell) or through the use of his five wits (the concept of five wits- common sense, imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory) but through his desire in his heart. He is unable to control his attraction towards her, despite knowing her faults and even knowing how she does not belong only to him. His only consolation is his attraction towards her, which is an award itself in its pain.

### 4.3.4 Structure and style

The poem is written in a sonnet form and follows the abab cdcd efef gg. The three quatrains describe the writer's infatuation towards the dark Lady while the final couplet defines his helplessness and the pain he derives through his relationship. The final couplet also establishes the poet's perverseness in his attachment to the Dark Lady, and his own doubts about the sensual nature of his relationship to the Dark Lady. The poet himself is unsure about his attachment and questions his own attachment that has no spiritual meaning or a deep understanding.

### 4.3.5 Techniques

This uses the style of a sonnet to deliver the message and true to Shakespearean sonnets written to the Dark Lady, it focuses on sensual descriptions and sexual attraction towards the Dark Lady. The use of the final couplet ushers in the final denouement to the sonnet; the poet's realisation of his own faults and his own foolish attraction.

### 4.3.6 Issues and themes

Attraction and sensual pleasure derived out of pleasing the five senses is a strong theme that runs through the sonnet. Unlike the fair youth sonnets, Dark Lady sonnets are full of sexualised images and references to pleasures derived out of pleasing the senses.

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<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/collections/?gclid=CJ3WqYil7NICFQdxvAodJ6oLIQ> Accessed on 23/03/17

## **4.4 Batter My Heart**

**John Donne**

### **4.4.1 Socio – cultural back ground of the poem**

Donne's poetry marks a shift from the traditional Elizabethan poetry of his age both in form as well as in the subject matter. While the poets following the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry, made the woman a heroine and a goddess, worthy of love and admiration, Donne along with the other metaphysical poets highlighted the weaknesses of women, as human beings, through his poetry. Moreover unlike the conceits found in Petrarchan love poetry which formed clichéd comparisons between more closely related objects (such as a rose and love), metaphysical conceits go to a greater depth in comparing two completely unlike objects. One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" where he compares two lovers who are separated to the two legs of a compass.

"Batter My Heart" is part of the series called Holy Sonnets that Donne composed just after he was ordained in the Church of England. Many critics believed this series to be written during the early 1600's and to embody Donne's struggle in accepting the sacred, spiritual love together with the more ordinary earthly forms of love in his life.

### **4.4.2 Introduction to the poet**

Donne was born in London in 1572 into a Roman Catholic family, when practice of that religion was illegal in England. Donne was the third of six children. He was initially educated at home by Catholic tutors and then he entered Hart Hall, now Hertford College, Oxford, from the age of 11. After three years at Oxford he entered University of Cambridge, where he studied for another three years. However he was unable to obtain a degree from either institution due to his Catholicism, since he could not take the Oath of Supremacy required of graduates. Then in 1591 he was accepted as a student at the Thavies Inn legal school and afterwards he entered Lincoln's Inn, one of the Inns of Court. Although there is no record detailing precisely where he travelled, it is known that Donne travelled across Europe and by the age of 25 he was well

prepared for the diplomatic career he was seeking. He was appointed chief secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton, and was established at Egerton's London home, York House, Strand close to the Palace of Whitehall, then the most influential social centre in England.

In 1601, Donne secretly married Anne Moore, with whom he had twelve children. His wife died on 15 August 1617, five days after giving birth to their twelfth child. In 1615, he became an Anglican priest, although he did not want to take Anglican orders. He did so because King James I persistently ordered it. In 1621, he was appointed the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London. He also served as a member of parliament in 1601 and in 1614. He died on 31 March 1631 having written many poems, most only in manuscript.

John Donne wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems. His works include sonnets, love poetry, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. His poetry is renowned for its vibrancy of language, strong, sensual style and inventiveness of metaphor, especially compared to that of his contemporaries. He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits. Thus he is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets, a word coined in 1781 by the critic Dr Samuel Johnson, following a comment on Donne by the poet John Dryden. A metaphysical conceit is an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery.

#### **4.4.3 Overview of the poem**

"Batter My Heart" composed as the 14<sup>th</sup> in a collection of Holy Sonnets, describe the complex relationship of the narrator with religion. He begins the poem by requesting the Holy Trinity ( The Father/ God, The son/ Christ, and the Holy Spirit) to batter or attack his heart as if it were a town or a fortress that needs to be taken over. The narrator desires the God to enter his heart aggressively and make him new. Despite his desire to be taken over by the religion and God, he accepts that he is unable to be completely overtaken by God because of his rationality. He is aware that he is more tied to the enemy of Christianity and spirituality by being too rational and wants God to divorce him/ separate him from such ties, to surrender completely to the love and spiritual happiness accorded by God and religion. The last two lines introduces the paradoxical nature of his desires. The narrator requests God to captivate him to be completely

free and to overpower him to be virtuous. Thus the narrator's desire to be spiritually complete and to be immersed in his spiritual acceptance of God and religion are expressed through the sonnet, especially by projecting the conflict between rationality and his desire to accept divinity without any reservations.

#### **4.4.4 Structure and style**

This is written as a Petrarchan sonnet with 14 lines and a rhyme scheme of abba, abba, cdcd, and ee. As line 9 is the turn of the sonnet, this sonnet too changes the tone of the poem using metaphysical conceit in the line 9. While in the beginning of the sonnet, the narrator describes himself as an impenetrable fortress, in the line 9 of the sonnet, the narrator changes his personae to that of a lover betrothed to someone else other than his desired partner: God. This is written using iambic pentameter and reflects the urgency to be wholly owned by God in the first line by using stronger syllables and later it changes to softer syllables, signalling acceptance and dawning spiritual awakening.

#### **4.4.5 Techniques**

Uses the Petrarchan sonnet form and uses iambic pentameter to highlight the sonnet's meaning.

#### **4.4.6 Issues and themes**

**Difference between earthly love and spiritual love** - According to the narrator of the poem, he wants to be consumed and possessed by the spiritual love that transcends all earthly concerns such as rationality and earthly bonds.

**Religion Vs love** - Once again this theme is brought out through the use of metaphysical conceit in which he stresses on the desire to be fully engrossed in religious love towards God. For the narrator of the poem, there is no higher love than the love for God and God's love.

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## **4.5 Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star**

### **John Donne**

#### **4.5.1 Socio-cultural background of the poem**

Donne's poetry marks a shift from the traditional Elizabethan poetry of his age both in form as well as in the subject matter. While the poets following the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry, made the woman a heroine and a goddess, worthy of love and admiration, Donne along with the other metaphysical poets made fun of the weaknesses and the fickleness of women. Moreover unlike the conceits found in Petrarchan love poetry which formed clichéd comparisons between more closely related objects (such as a rose and love), metaphysical conceits go to a greater depth in comparing two completely unlike objects. One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" where he compares two lovers who are separated to the two legs of a compass.

#### **4.5.2 Introduction to the poet**

Donne was born in London in 1572 into a Roman Catholic family, when practice of that religion was illegal in England. Donne was the third of six children. He was initially educated at home by Catholic tutors and then he entered Hart Hall, now Hertford College, Oxford, from the age of 11. After three years at Oxford he entered University of Cambridge, where he studied for another three years. However he was unable to obtain a degree from either institution due to his Catholicism, since he could not take the Oath of Supremacy required of graduates. Then in 1591 he was accepted as a student at the Thavies Inn legal school and afterwards he entered Lincoln's Inn, one of the Inns of Court. Although there is no record detailing precisely where he travelled, it is known that Donne travelled across Europe and by the age of 25 he was well prepared for the diplomatic career he was seeking. He was appointed chief secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton, and was established at Egerton's London home, York House, Strand close to the Palace of Whitehall, then the most influential social centre in England.

In 1601, Donne secretly married Anne Moore, with whom he had twelve children. His wife died on 15 August 1617, five days after giving birth to their twelfth child. In 1615, he became an Anglican priest, although he did not want to take Anglican orders. He did so because King James I persistently ordered it. In 1621, he was appointed the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London.

He also served as a member of parliament in 1601 and in 1614. He died on 31 March 1631 having written many poems, most only in manuscript.

John Donne wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems. His works include sonnets, love poetry, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. His poetry is renowned for its vibrancy of language, strong, sensual style and inventiveness of metaphor, especially compared to that of his contemporaries. He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits. Thus he is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets, a word coined in 1781 by the critic Dr Samuel Johnson, following a comment on Donne by the poet John Dryden. A metaphysical conceit is an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery.

#### **4.5.3 Overview of the poem**

On the surface Donne's "Song: Go and catch a falling star" which was published in 1633, appears to be an assertion of the deviousness and the vagaries of women during his time. The implication of his poem is that just as it is difficult to achieve the plethora of tasks he orders the unseen young man or the reader, it is nearly impossible to find a woman who is both "true and fair", or beautiful as well as faithful.

The poem begins with the speaker ordering the unseen young man or the reader to complete several elusive tasks both mythical and real such as: go and catch a meteor, get pregnant using a mandrake root, find out where the past has gone, find out who split the devil's foot, to teach him the art of listening to a mermaid's singing or the skill of not being affected by the pain of jealousy and finally to find out what environmental condition would bring up an honest mind. Mandrake in the second line refers to a plant which resembles human form and was associated with fertility and used in witchcraft in the middle ages.

In the second stanza the poet says, if the reader has the ability to see "strange sights" or to see "things invisible" then he should go ten thousand days and nights, till he has hair white with age in search of a woman who is both "true and fair" or beautiful as well as faithful. The speaker says even after such drawn-out journey he would still come and say that it was impossible to find such a woman.

The last stanza begins with the poet saying that if the reader somehow found such a woman, it would be a rewarding “pilgrimage” to even go and see such a unique woman. Then again he asks the reader not to let him know of the existence of such a woman even if she lived next door, as she would prove to be unfaithful at least to two or three men by the time the reader wrote a letter to the speaker about her, although she could have been both “true and fair” when the reader first found her.

#### **4.5.4 Structure and style**

Although this poem was published posthumously in 1633, it has been difficult to determine the exact date when Donne wrote it. Therefore it falls under the category of Donne’s “younger works” or his “love poems”. The tone of the poem is cynical and satirical. The three stanzas each contains a sestet with a rhyme scheme of ababcc/ ababbb/ababcc and concludes with a rhyming triplet. In each stanza the tetrameter is interrupted by two monometer lines(7 & 8) creating a pause in the middle of the stanzas which set up the surprising final line and add greatly to the musical quality of the poem. Donne has employed a colloquial form which resembles casual speech.

#### **4.5.5 Techniques**

Donne has employed many poetic devices such as allusion, alliteration, hyperbole, imagery and metaphor in this poem. Allusion can be seen in line five where there is a reference to mermaids.

The beautiful sea creatures called Sirens in Greek mythology would lure men with their beautiful singing, to deep sea and destroy them. This is used by Donne to bring out the deceitful nature of women. Alliteration is seen in line 10-”be’st born” and “strange sights”, line 22- “might meet”. Hyperbole can be seen in line 12-”Ride ten thousand days and nights”- used to show the impossibility of finding a beautiful and faithful woman even after such long journey. Imagery from many fields such as astronomy, sailing, mythology and religion can be seen in this poem. As commonly seen in metaphysical poetry all these diverse images have been used to exaggerate the difficulty in finding a beautiful and faithful woman. The metaphor of a falling star has been used in this poem to refer to the said woman.

#### 4.5.6 Issues and themes

The main theme of the poem is deviousness and the infidelity of women and the difficulty in finding a beautiful woman who is virtuous. However the poem is not just about the fickleness and the faithlessness of women as read with a contemporary point of view, it could also be read with a spiritual view about fallen humanity.

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## **4.6 To the Memory of Mr Oldham**

### **John Dryden**

#### **4.6.1 Socio-political Background**

To the Memory of Mr Oldham is written in 1684 with direct references to the demise of John Oldham (1653- 1684) – an English poet who experienced a premature death in his 30s, and who explored, to a great extent in his satirical poems, the religious and political discontent and turmoil in the contemporary England. Thus, the poem is written, explicitly through the title of the poem, in memory of the deceased and because Dryden and Oldham had shared interests in political satire. Oldham was born in Gloucestershire in England and received his education at Tetbury Grammar School, then at St. Edmund Hall at the University of Oxford. He received a B. A. degree in 1674 and became an usher at the Whitgift School in Croydon, Surrey, England. He was poorly paid there, but it left time for him to compose poetry. He met Dryden when he settled in London later in his life. Oldham died of smallpox in 1684.

The poem, To the Memory of Mr Oldham, also allegorically refers to Vigil's 'Augustan Epic', specifically to the Aeneid. It refers to the two friends, Nisus and Euryalus, who served under Aeneas – a Trojan hero in Greek mythology – and to Marcellus, Augustus's nephew: Augustus laments Marcellus' death and glorifies him.

#### **4.6.2 Introduction to the Poet**

John Dryden (1631-1700) is an English poet of the seventeenth century, reputed for his political satires. He was born in 1631 into an extended family of rising Puritan gentry in a village rectory of Aldwinckle in Thrapston, Northamptonshire, England. As a teenager, he was sent to the King's College at Westminster for his education where Dryden was exposed to Royalism and high Anglicanism. Dryden, in 1650, went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he received a space to examine in detail the religious and political ethos of his childhood.

Dryden was a dominating literary figure in the period of Restoration – the realm in England in 1660 which marked the return of Charles II as king (1660–85) following the period of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth. Consequently, the period was also referred to as the Age of Dryden. Samuel Johnson, a great prose stylist of the period describes Dryden as follows and it

also leads to originate the term – ‘Age of Dryden’ in literary studies: “What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden .... He found it brick, and left it marble” (1781-1905). His works include great satires, for instance, *Mac Flecknoe* (1682), *The Medall* (1682) and *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). He also contributed greatly to the literary field through his odes, elegies, prologues, and epilogues. Dryden was made England’s first Poet Laureate in 1668.

### 4.6.3 Overview

As noted, the poem seems a tribute in verse to Oldham, and to his poetic achievements. Dryden, while assessing Oldham’s literary excellence, laments the premature death of Oldham. The poet begins articulating his regret and grief over the demise and loss. It goes on to describe and clarify their relationship – the close bond he had with the younger, Oldham.

Farewell, too little, and too lately known,

Whom I began to think, and call my own:

For sure our souls were near allied, and thine

He explains further and offers a rationalisation of their relationship saying that both of them have shared interests – satire:

Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.

One common note on either lyre did strike.

Dryden also emphasises their commonality by referring to their experiences and reactions to people; both have been exposed alike to dishonest men and stupid society and both have disregarded lack of intelligence in society. Their aim in their literary career is the same: “knaves and fools we both abhorred alike” and “to the same goal did both our studies drive”.

As noted above, Dryden also refers to a memory related by Virgil about two friends, Nisus and Euryalus. Within *Aeneid*, one sad episode is the story of Nisus and Euryalus, two friends who follow the Trojan noble Aeneas to a new home, and who are excited to experience glory and adventure. They competed in a footrace staged by Aeneas and during the race, Nisus fell, allowing Aeneas to win.

Dryden, however, subtly refers to discrepancies in their poetic approaches as well. For instance, he writes that Oldham's "generous fruits," or talents, were "gathered ere their prime", implying Oldham's immaturity. While doing so, Dryden uses his famous alexandrine - a line with a meter of six feet, perhaps to highlight his own poetic skills and talents.

Thy generous fruits, though gathered ere their prime,  
Still showed a quickness; and maturing time  
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme.

Throughout the poem, Dryden reveals Oldham's skills, and focuses on the farewell.

#### **4.6.4 Structure and Style**

This seems an elegy - a mournful poem, a lamentation, which is composed in remembrance of a deceased or departed. The structure of an elegy is typically three-fold: the description or the grief of the loss; the admiration of the loss and the consolation or realisation of the loss. Also, an elegy is usually a loss of an individual rather than the loss of people. This poem focuses on Oldham, the satirist, yet it shows only the grief and the admiration of the dead.

#### **4.6.5 Techniques**

As noted, Dryden uses the format of an elegy. Dryden's practice of making allusions, especially as an artistic device, is seen throughout the poem: for instance, the indirect passing references to the Virgil.

Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,  
While his young friend performed and won the race.  
Once more, hail and farewell! Farewell, thou young,  
But ah too short, Marcellus of our tongue!

Dryden's subtle use of polarities is also explicit throughout the poem: his reference to hierarchies such as Nisus and Euryalus, Augustus and Marcellus and Dryden and Oldham. For instance, Oldham is compared to Nisus, while Dryden subtly compares himself to Nisus' counterpart, Euryalus. Dryden's reference to Marcellus alludes to the relationship between

Augustus, the Roman Emperor and Marcellus his nephew who meets with a premature death and who was supposed to be Augustus' successor. Classical and formal language coupled with the spoken, conversational tone also signifies Dryden's poetic skills. Metaphors are also used to highlight the meaning: "Marcellus of our tongue".

#### **4.6.6 . Themes and Issues**

The poem reminds readers of death, departure and loss, a universal truth experienced by human beings irrespective of their race, class, gender, or creed. It specially shows the death of an individual with whom the speaker has built a deep relationship through professional bonds. References to classical and mythical stories also highlight that death is a common and universal experience. The poem also signifies how people meet with tragic, unexpected and untimely deaths before they reach their expectations. People may start their journey/life together, yet death is an individual journey. Recognition, respect and material gains and rewards one may receive in his/her life will not be carried with the dead when he/ she leaves the world. The poem also represents the subtle pain that is felt at the death of every friendly relationship. It is usual to praise the good deeds at the death of individuals. Thus, the poem reminds readers of the impermanence, a doctrine which asserts that all of conditioned existence, without exception, is transient and inconstant.

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## **4.7 Canto 3 - An extract from the Rape of the Lock**

### **Alexander Pope**

#### **4.7.1 Introduction to the Poet**

Alexander Pope (1688-1738) - Alexander Pope was born on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1688 in London, to a Roman Catholic family. He was a sick and delicate child and as a result became a keen and sensitive reader. He was financially independent and so could pursue his interests in literature. It has been said that a brief interview with Dryden when he was twelve determined his career. In 1709, he completed his *Essay on Criticism* – a didactic poem on the canons of literary taste and style.

Pope's masterpiece is the *Rape of the Lock*, written in 1712, a brilliant satire on the fashionable life of the upper class of his time. The artificiality of the lifestyle of this class and the frivolous nature of the women are, exquisitely portrayed in this 'epic' which parodies the great classical epics. Soon after its publication, the great French political philosopher and social critic, Voltaire described Pope as the best 'poet of England, and at present of the world'. At the age of twenty four, he came to be regarded as the best poet of his time.

Between 1715 and 1725, Pope was engaged in translating Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* (written in heroic couplets). During this period he also published two powerful poems – *the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* and *Epistle of Eloise to Abelard*. Pope wrote his other great poem, *Dunciad* often described as his 'vision of torment in 1743.' Pope died in 1774 and was buried in Twickenham.

#### **4.7.2 Overview of the Poem**

The *Rape of the Lock*, is a mock-heroic poem which parodies the great classical heroic epics in style and form. It is satire at the highest level. The poem ridicules the fashionable world of his time. Its immediate aim was to laugh at two families of his acquaintance into making up a petty quarrel over a somewhat trivial matter, (1711). Twenty one year old Robert (Lord Petre)

had at Bedinfield, surreptitiously cut a lock of hair from the head of beautiful Arabella Fermour, whom he had been courting. Arabella took offence and a schism developed between her family and Petre's. John Caryll a mutual friend and a friend of Pope's suggested that he created a humorous poem about the episode which would demonstrate to both sides that the whole incident had been blown out of proportion, and consequently effect a reconciliation between the two families. Pope wrote his poem and it seemed to have achieved its purpose, although Arabella never married Petre.

In the course of time this poem, after being revised and enlarged was published in 1714, and proved by its 'brilliance of conception and consistency of execution,' unsurpassed in English literature.

At the beginning, imitating the heroic epic, Pope invokes his friend Caryl, who asked Pope to write a literary work, focusing on a minor social event that turned two families into bitter enemies.

Unlike the traditional epics, *The Rape of the Lock* is short, with less than 600 lines. Instead of great military preparations (in the epics), Pope humourously describes Belinda's preparations for beautifying herself – 'puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet – doux'. Belinda's actions parody those of the great Greek heroes in battle. The reduction of the action from the heroic to the trivial make *The Rape of the Lock* a satirical mock- epic. The moment of crisis is the clipping of the lock of hair. The heroic is inverted by trivializing the situation, and using petty characters. Instead of heroism, suspense and fear, laughter and derision is created. Instead of great battle grounds where heroes of repute clash, Pope described the movements of Belinda and Baron during a card game called Ombre, which involves only three players and a deck of forty cards. Instead of great sea voyages, Belinda travels up the Thames in a boat. In the great epics gods and goddesses play a significant role. Pope creates imaginary, supernatural figures like Sulphs, Syphids, Fays, Fairies, Genii, Elves and Demons – lesser spirits and ridiculous as protective agents.

The poet divides the poem into five cantos with three settings.

Canto 1 - London and its surroundings in the 1780s, on a single day and the

London residence of Belinda as she prepares for a gala social gathering.

Canto 2 - On a boat carrying Belinda up the Thames.

Canto 3-5 - Hampton Court palace - former palace of King Henry VIII.

The extract set for study is Canto 3.

### 4.7.3 Structure and Style of Canto 3

The critical event takes place in this Canto.

The Canto begins with the arrival of ladies and gentlemen at Hampton Court Palace in a boat.

The action has three movements:

- (i) After a pleasant round of chatting and gossip, Belinda sits down with two men to a game of cards – they play ombre – a three headed game of tricks. Pope describes this card game in the likeness of a heroic battle – the cards are troops combating each other on the velvet plain of the card table.

Belinda under the watchful eyes of the Sylphs (like the gods and goddesses watching over the great heroes in the classics!) begins with great confidence. She declares spades as trumps and leads with her highest cards sure of success. But her chances of success go down as Baron enters the field. He catches her King of Clubs with his queen and leads back with high diamonds. Belinda is almost beaten but recovers in the last trick. She just barely wins back what she bid.

- (ii) The next movement is the ritualistic serving of coffee. The curly vapour reminds the Baron of his intention of cutting Belinda's lock. Clarissa draws out her scissors for him as a lady would arm a knight in the old days of romance. Taking up the scissors, he tries three times to clip the lock from behind without Belinda seeing it. A Sylph tries desperately to protect Belinda's lock, blowing the hair out of harm's way and tweaking her diamond earrings to make her turn round. All in vain. Finally Ariel gains access to her brain, but finds an earthly lover lurking in her heart and gives up (This suggest that she really wants to be violated).

Finally the scissors close on the curl. A Sylph tries to intervene but is cut in two. Being ethereal however he quickly becomes whole.

The lock is cut and the Baron exults, while Belinda screams her heart out.

The mock epic form is used by Pope to burlesque the trivial event and the shallow characters involved in it. The trite/ trivial event is satirized / ridiculed by discussing it in a lofty/ grandiose manner.

#### **4.7.4 Techniques used in the poem.**

Pope uses the (a) mock epic to create high burlesque. He uses the lofty and exalted style of the epic with an utterly trivial subject. He mocks the subject matter (event and characters) by treating it with a dignity it does not deserve.

He uses the (mock) (b) heroic couplet for this purpose. A heroic couplet is a pair of rhymed lines written in iambic pentameter. In introducing Hampton Court Pope describes it as the place where Queen Anne resides:

Here thou, great Anna! Whom three realms obey

Dost sometimes counsel take and sometimes tea.

This line employs a Zeugma – a rhetorical device in which a word/ phrase modifies two other words or phrases in a parallel construction but modifies them according to a different sense. Eg. Take. The effect is that the royal residence is a place where both serious matters (matters of the state) as well as frivolous social events occur. This creates irony and a critical view of the establishment. It is paradoxical that the mighty and trivial are juxtaposed against each other. Look at the following lines as well. (157-158).

No louder, shrieks to pitying heavens are cast

When husbands or when lapdogs breathe their last.

The poem is also a classic example of parody. The rendering of the card game as a battle becomes an amusing and deft narrative. It parodies the great battle scenes of the great epic poems. Through the parody Pope suggests that the energy and passion once applied to brave

and serious purposes is now spent on such insignificant trials such as card games and gambling which are part of loose, flirtatious behavior.

The structure of the three attempts by which the lock is cut is a convention of heroic challenges (in the romantic tradition). The romantic tradition is further invoked in the image of Clarissa arming the Baron not with a military weapon but with a pair of sewing scissors.

The parody reduces the whole episode and satirizes it. For example Belinda is not a real adversary. Her resistance and subsequent distress are apparently affected – blown out of proportion. It is part of the shallow and loose moralled way of life of the court. Pope's intention is to satirize its entire way of life.

Belinda's behaviour is melodramatic. Her screams complemented by the victorious cries of her assailant which is compared to the conquest of nations is satire at its sharpest. Pope uses both irony and wit in creating satire.

#### **4.7.5 Themes and Issues (in the poem)**

Some of the themes / issues raised in the poem are,

##### **(a) Reversal of Gender roles**

18<sup>th</sup> Century society in England expected certain stereotypes – women to be modest and men to be masculine. But in the poem both Belinda and Clarissa are strong, dominant women. The men in the poem are effeminate. Baron is a fop and show off. He needs a woman – Clarissa to empower him. He makes much of a trivial and foolish act.

##### **(b) Female sexuality**

Women were expected to be modest and retain high moral values. A woman who transgresses is sidelined and ostracized. The word 'rape' is significant in the poem. Belinda's wanton behavior earns her the 'rape' of her lock and the consequent rage and shame.

**(c) The deterioration of heroic ideals.**

The parody of great classical epics reflect the fall in stature of Pope's society and the deterioration of its values. The personages in the heroic epics were men of great moral worth. In comparison those found in the Rape of the Lock are weak and shallow individuals.

**(d) Perversion of religious ideals.**

Eroticism is mixed with religion. Eg: Belinda's cross. In the toiletry various items of make-up and beautification are given the same status as the Bible.

**(e) Idleness of the upper class.**

The ruling classes are involved in very superficial, unimportant activities. Eg: gambling, partying, etc.

The enjoyment derived from clipping a fellow member's hair is a sign of the depravity the upper class had sunk to.

**(f) The ephemeral nature of beauty.**

Appearance is given too much prominence. Men worshipped the beauty of women – physical beauty was more highly regarded than strength of character. Eg: Clarissa's lecture.

**(g) Man's place in the Universe Pope discusses man's relationship with God,**

**fellow human beings and himself:** the fundamental ethic of man's existence. The Rape of The Lock is a criticism of amoral society.

**(h) Human vanity and excess.**

Pope exposes the vanity of both Baron and Belinda by comparing their actions with the great moral feats of the classical characters. He also suggests that the characters herein are uncontrolled and undisciplined. It was the age of reason and here we find vanity and passion uncontrolled, and hence becoming a target of Pope's criticism.

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## **4.8 Chimney Sweeper**

### **William Blake**

#### **4.8.1 Socio-cultural background to the poem**

William Blake is an English poet and artist and is recognized as one of the most important poets of the Romantic Age. His most popular collection is called the Songs of Innocence published in 1789 which was followed by Songs of Experience in 1794. A sympathizer of the American and French revolutions in the 18th century, he was socially and politically conscious and was considered as a nonconformist who questioned the oppressive authority of the Church and State. He is also considered as a spiritual and mystical poet, incorporating the world of the divine into his poetry. He is established as one of the most moving poets in the English language. Chimney Sweeper is from Songs of Innocence.

#### **4.8.2 Introduction to the poet**

Blake was born in Soho in London in 1757, and was the son of a hosier. Having never attended school, and being taught primarily by his mother, he was also an imaginative child who talked of visionary experiences from an early age, having witnessed God and angels. Blake started writing poetry from his early teens. Yet his initial passion was in art and at age 10, he was enrolled in a drawing school. At 14, he was apprenticed to a master engraver, as his parents could not afford art school. At 21, he left his apprenticeship and enrolled at the Royal Academy. He earned his living by mostly engraving illustrations for publications of booksellers. In 1782, Blake married Catherine Boucher who, though illiterate, was not only a devoted wife but also an able assistant. In 1783, he published his first collection of poems, Poetical Sketches, and later began to work with a radical publisher called Joseph Johnson, who introduced him to some of the leading radical intellectuals of the time such as Joseph Priestly, Richard Price, John Henry Fuseli, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, William Wordsworth and William Godwin. As such, political radicalism is evident in his poetry. He later developed illuminated printing which he used to illustrate his poems. However, he had few patrons, and lived the last years of his life in obscurity and poverty. Till his death in 1827, he continued to write poetry as well as illustrate.

Blake lived at a time of great political and social change. The American Revolution in 1775 and the French revolution in 1789 created significant changes in society, and questioned

traditional political systems of monarchy, feudalism and colonialism, calling for more social and political autonomy and equality. The French Revolution, especially, inspired London reformers and radicals to ask for greater change in England. Poverty and disease were rampant in London, and factories and overcrowded housing began to line the landscape due to the industrial revolution. The condition of the poor and the children was bleak, due to the rise in population and poor harvest. Children of the poor were forced by the economic conditions to work and were sent to workhouses in London, and orphans and illegitimate children were sold into apprenticeships that were exploitative. Many boys were used as chimney sweeps. Blake's writing was indeed inspired by such injustice.

It is also significant that his parents were English Dissenters. Dissent was a religious and intellectual tradition which argued for greater equality, and questioned the aristocracy. Influenced perhaps by such religious thinking, Blake rejected many aspects of the social establishment.

Blake was also a Romantic poet. Romanticism was an artistic and philosophical movement which took place in Europe at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. It followed the age of Enlightenment and broke away from tradition and convention. In fact, Romanticism was inspired by the American and French Revolutions, and advocated liberty, democracy, and the rights of man. It focused on the individual and the development of his internal self, and paid importance to instinct and feeling, and not logic and reason. Romantics were personal and subjective and found solace in nature, as an escape from industrialization and civilization. They discussed the impact of the industrial revolution on the natural world. The most important English Romantics were Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge and Blake. As such, Blake too possessed greater sensitivity to the society in which he lived and was able to reflect on moving experiences of life.

### **4.8.3 Overview of the poem**

The poem is narrated by the Chimney sweep in simple language, and is a dramatic monologue. It is divided into six stanzas and each stanza contains four lines, in rhyming couplets.

The Chimney Sweeper is a poem of social protest and focuses on childhood, one of the most important preoccupations of the Romantics. Blake discusses child labour in London and focuses on the chimney sweeps, who were very young, and were bought, sold and traded into a life of hard labour, to climb down chimneys which were roughly only seven inches square. Many suffered deformity as a result and the practice was abolished in 1875.

The poem begins with the speaker, a chimney sweep, who narrates his unfortunate past. His mother had died when he was young and his father had sold him to sweep chimneys. Next, he describes another young boy, fellow chimney sweep Tom Dacre, who cried when his head was shaved in preparation for work. He advises Tom not to cry as the soot would have spoilt his hair if he had not shaved. In the third stanza, the speaker describes a dream Tom had had, that same night, of thousands of sweepers locked up in black coffins. The Fourth stanza discusses how an angel sets them all free from their coffins, and how they all frolic in the sun. The fifth depicts how the boys, now free and ecstatic, “rise upon clouds and sport in the wind”. Tom is told by the angel that if he is good, he will forever be joyous as God will be his Father. The poem concludes with the speaker ending his narration of Tom’s dream and describing how Tom awoke the next morning, ready for work. Tom is happy despite the cold outside, as he believes that if he does his duty, he need not fear harm.

#### **4.8.4 Issues and Themes**

The poem is a radical critic of the social injustices of Blake’s age. First, Blake condemns child labour which was a large part of the labour force during the industrial revolution. Innocent children robbed of their childhood were subject to inhuman conditions, and Blake compares the chimneys to black coffins which entomb the young boys, subsequently signifying the boys’ death. In the process, the poem also attacks parents who are callous and driven by mercenary motives who deny their children basic human rights. But what is most striking is his indictment of the established Church. Through the young and vulnerable Tom, the speaker exposes the hypocrisy of the Church which recommends and thereby justifies the dirty and dangerous work Tom is subject to, by promising him a better afterlife. Tom is made to believe that he will be eventually rewarded for his earthly struggles. As a result, the little Tom is reconciled to wretched working conditions. Blake suggests that such institutions perpetuate injustice by blinding people from understanding the nature and source of oppression. Tom and

the rest of the boys will not agitate or question their social position or condition, and will be instead obedient and submissive as they are promised contentment in heaven. Thus, the innocent children are convinced to solicit divine intervention if necessary which would remedy all social ills in society, while they continue their harsh lives.

## **4.9 A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal**

**William Wordsworth**

### **4.9.1 Socio Cultural Background.**

In the late eighteenth century, during the time of Wordsworth, the Industrial Revolution began to transform life in Britain. Prior to that most people lived in the countryside and made their livelihood from farming. But by the middle of the next century people lived in towns and made their living from mining and manufacturing industries. The steam engines invented by Thomas Newcom (1663-1729) and James Watt founded the basics for technological advances that revolutionized industry.

Between 1700-1800 Britain built a great overseas empire. It lost America after the war of independence but won India and Canada at the end of the seven years war. It also conquered many islands in the West Indies. In 1707 the Act of Union was passed bringing Scotland and England together as Great Britain.

There were changes on the economic side as well. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, owning land was the main form of wealth; political power and influence was in the hands of the landowners called the gentry. The yeoman class sandwiched between the gentry and working class virtually disappeared. Instead, a middle class, comprising merchants and professional men came into seeing. Below them were the work men of the population, eg: craftsmen and labourers. Half the population lived below subsistence level or mere survival level. This popularized cheap liquor like gin. Slavery was a profitable enterprise and the Clapham sect campaigned against it and cruelty to animals.

The demography of the country changed – population grew. In 1801 it was nine millions. In London it was around 1.0 million.

Britain advanced rapidly during this time. There were new industrial towns in the Midlands and North of England. Eg: Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester.

Agriculture was transformed by an agricultural revolution. Eg: Jethro Tull and Robert Townsend were instrumental. They introduced scientific methods to farming and stockbreeding.

Transport improved with the making of tarred roads and turnpike units. Canals were developed to transport goods.

Advancements in technology and industrialization were evenly paced. Cotton and iron production bounded as a result.

But there was a big gap between the rich and poor. A tiny minority lived in luxury. The rich built country houses and furnished them elegantly.

But the poor had none of these and lived in stark poverty. The gap was seen in education as well. The rich went to grammar schools. Girls from rich families were given education. The poor had only substandard charity schools.

The wide disparities in the social order triggered off a strong radicalism led by intellectuals, artists and writers. The Romantic Movement sprang against elitism and the established order. The gathering storm across the English Channel in France, which culminated in the French Revolution had its impact on social activists and thinkers. Triggered off by Jean Jacques Rousaus's (1762) *The Social Contract* of which the central theme was "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains", the former gave leadership to the new thinking and strove to create a more equal social order. The need for a more democratic system and justice for subject people (Edmund Burke) was voiced.

#### **4.9.2 Introduction to the Poet.**

Wordsworth (1770-1860) was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, 1770 at Cockermouth, Cumberland, England, the Son of John and Anne Cookson Wordsworth. There were five children in the family who were close to each other. The support provided Wordsworth by his sister Dorothy was almost legendary, Wordsworth's father was legal agent to Sir James Lowther (later Earl of Lansdale) a political magnate and property owner. Wordsworth's love for the 'beauteous forms' of nature was established early, living in a kind of rural paradise along the Derwent river, which passed the terraced garden below their house. Wordsworth's childhood was clouded by the death of his mother in 1778 and five years later in 1783 by the death of his father. Wordsworth attended Hawkshead Grammar School where his love of poetry was firmly established. He proceeded to St. John's College Cambridge and before the final semester he set out on a walking tour of Europe – an experience that influenced both his poetry and his political sensibility. While

touring he came in contact with the French Revolution. This experience as well as the subsequent stay in France developed his sympathy and concern for the life, troubles and speech of the common people. He fell passionately in love with Annette Vallon by whom he had a daughter. The unrequited affair left him with sense of guilt which is expressed in his poems about abandoned women.

In 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson a childhood friend and had five children. Two died in 1812.

Wordsworth's first poems were published in 1793, in the collection entitled – An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches. An important event of the early period of his writing was his meeting with Coleridge. With him he published the Lyrical Ballads in 1798. Wordsworth's attitude to life and poetry are spelled out in the Preface. It was a testament to a poet's view on his craft and place in the world. Not only did Wordsworth express his own philosophy as a poet, he also criticized the contemporary poets' compositions which he described as using a gaudy and inane phraseology. In the Lyrical Ballads, he published his landmark work - The Tintern Abbey. In its successful tracing of inner and outer experiences of sense perception, feelings and thoughts Tintern Abbey is a poem in which the poet becomes a symbol of mankind. This cosmic outlook is a central feature of romanticism.

In his middle years he worked on his magnum opus - The Prelude. But it is in the shorter poems that his intrinsic poetic creativity is displayed. Eg: To the Cuckoo, I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud, etc.

When he was thirty two, his philosophy of life changed partly due to his dissolution with the French Revolution and also his concern for Coleridge who had become an opium addict. Together they came to understand that the realities of life were very different to the visionary expectations of their early youth. This made him write a different kind of poetry. He turned to Scotland and England (Recollections of a Tour of Scotland (1803-1814) and wrote poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty.

Wordsworth was appointed poet Laureate in 1843.

His undiminished love of nature made him view the emergent industrial society with undisguised reserve. He opposed the Reform Bill of 1832 which transferred power from the landed class to the manufacturing class, which brought about misery for the exploited workers.

#### **4.9.3 Wordsworth the Naturalist or Nature Lover.**

What nature meant to Wordsworth was a complex issue. It is said that Wordsworth was the quintessential poet as naturalist always paying close attention to details of the physical environment around him. But at the same time he was self-consciously the literary artist who described the mind of man (“the main haunt and region of his song”). Wordsworth viewed the mind as both creator and receiver as objective describer of the natural scene and the subjective shaper of sensory experience. He consistently described his own mind as the recipient of external sensations which are then rendered into mental creations. At the heart of Wordsworth’s description of nature is the alliance of the inner life with the outer world. The power to record experiences as they occur – at the moment of observation – and to shape these experiences in the mind overtime bestow ‘an auxiliary light’ on the objects themselves. The core of his creative imagination was lived experience. But he was also influenced by the poems of John Milton, Coleridge, the writings of his sister Dorothy and Shakespeare and Thompson. Wordsworth the nature poet emerges from his widespread readings as well as of his wandering and of course the beautiful landscapes of the Lake District.

#### **4.9.4 Wordsworth the Romantic.**

The school of poetry that Wordsworth belonged to or the poetic genre he and his colleagues created is described as Romantic'. According to Stephanie Forward (British Library) Romanticism has wide coverage. It covers a range of developments in and literature, music and philosophy spanning the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Romantics were influenced by the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau who asserted that “Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains”. The changes in society effected by the Industrial Revolution which left a very unequal society, and dissatisfied intellectuals and artists challenged the establishment. In England the Romantic Poets were at the forefront of this movement.

They were inspired by a desire for liberty and denounced the exploitation of the poor (eg: Blake’s Poems). There was an emphasis on the importance of the individual and his aspirations

rather than on conventions and rules. This was reflected in the poet's reaction against the rationalization and order associated with the neo-classical poets. Conversely they emphasized the importance of expressing authentic personal feelings. They were genuinely concerned about their fellow men- the exploited and marginalized, particularly and felt it their duty to inform and inspire others to change society. Their poetry, most often Wordsworth's, was didactic in that sense.

Wordsworth's was a period of physical confrontation - of violent rebellion in parts of Europe and the new world. There was virtual anarchy in France triggered off by the French Revolution. Wordsworth and his fellow poets supported it at the beginning, hoping for positive social change. But the Reign of Terror disenchanted them profoundly. Wordsworth's attitude changed considerably and it is reflected in his poetry. In the poetry of Wordsworth and other romantics 'romanticism' is manifested broadly in:

- (a) the value given to the imagination and emotions (as highly rated as the reason and the intellect)
- (b) the belief in the goodness of human beings i.e. that by nature human beings are good
- (c) the value given to Nature as the source of sublime feelings, divine inspiration and even moral action
- (d) the celebration of the individual rather than the social order
- (e) criticizing oppressive, class-based political regimes and social forms,
- (f) Rejection of artistic rules, forms and conventions associated with classicism and Neo-classicism considering them to be restrictions that repressed individual poets' calling.
- (g) Freedom-both artistic and intellectual which promoted exploration and discovery.

#### 4.9.5 Overview of Poem – A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal

This poem was written by Wordsworth in 1798 and published in the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads. It is considered as one of the Lucy poems although Lucy is not mentioned by name. In the autumn of 1798 Wordsworth travelled in Germany with his sister Dorothy and Coleridge and made the first draft of his Lucy poems. A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal was one of those poems. It is not clear whether the situation is grounded in real experience. Coleridge had confessed that he was not aware whether it was a real experience. He had observed that in some gloomy moment Wordsworth may have fancied that his sister Dorothy might die. The ‘she’ in the poem has eluded identification. But this fact seems to be unimportant as it is evident that the poem is a continuation of a theme rather than a reference to an event.

A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal is one of the briefest of all the most famous poems in English. It has also roused intense critical debate. It has been described as a ‘case study in poetic ambiguity.’

Summarized, the poem would read like this;

The speaker was able to sleep soundly (Slumber and not sleep). He was at peace in a way that he will feel at peace (at the end of the first stanza). The first line seems to foreshadow the concluding sense of pain however in the second stanza. The word ‘human’ is loaded with meaning. Wordsworth seems to be talking of vulnerability – the common lot of human beings reflecting a kind of naïve innocence. (Is he counter posing the human as against nature?) Between the end of the last line of the first stanza and the beginning of the first line in the second a great change has occurred. She had died. The speaker never imagined the reality. The dead girl is both deaf and blind to animate life, in capable of responding to sensors of life. She has become one with inanimate nature.

*“Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course  
with rocks and stores and trees.”*

But one notices an ambiguity here. She has ceased to exist as human but is she absorbed and vitalized in nature as Wordsworth visualized it.

#### 4.9.6 Structure and Style of the Poem

The poem is a lyric, elegy and nature poem. It comprises eight lines – two stanzas of four lines (quatrains). The opening line emphasizes alliteration (Slumber, Spirit, and Seal) and is particularly musical/ lyrical. Assonance also prevails (did, spirit) inducing a dream like situation. The first stanza conveys a rather ‘nebulous’ image of a girl. It maintains a quiet even tone. The second stanza continues the quietness but it undermines the first stanza’s assurance for it is suggested that by then Lucy has died. It is to be noted that the girl’s death evokes no bitterness nor devastating grief or emptiness.

*No motion has she now, nor force,*

*She neither hears nor sees;*

Some critics suggest that the sleep referred to here is only the sleep of the senses but not of the soul.

It could relate to Wordsworth’s philosophy of life – of man’s relationship with nature – Lucy dying has become part of that magnificent universe – the universal soul.

*Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course*

*With rocks and stones and trees.*

Lucy is one with rocks and stones and also with trees. Their lives are not animate in the human sense – yet they have animation and the speaker seems to reconcile himself to reality. To illustrate this point the observations of Boris Ford seems to be very relevant.

“The dead girl is at last secure beyond form in inanimate community with the earth and its natural fixtures.”

The word ‘secure’ is very significant here. So is the word ‘community’. Lucy is secure in a community as if she had come to live in another sphere of life.

The poem is both elegy and lyric and generates a powerful emotional reaction. It is effected through the apparent similarity but the profound disparity between the two stanzas. The first creates a sense of security and assurance by its quiet matter of factness. But the space between the two stanzas depicts a change from life to death.

### **Winkler Observes:**

Wordsworth extracts from the given situation its own intrinsic emotional content choosing the language which records most literally and exactly, the quality of the experience described enabling the reader to relive it.

The poem engages the reader with its deep unvoiced emotion created particularly by the ironic contrast established by replacing the figurative language used in the first stanza with the stark factuality of the second stanza. The dream is shattered. **‘The touch of earthly years’**. Untrue when it was believed at first has become a reality by the literal fact of death, which puts her beyond the touch of time. The calm factuality of the second stanza reflects the calmness of death. The tone is not bitter or harsh but one of reconciliation and acceptance from the knowledge that the girl is secure in the natural, in the vast universe, being one with it.

#### **4.9.7 Techniques**

The poet uses various techniques to communicate his theme- some of these are;

- (a) Personal experience – the event/ incident is presented as his own experience. It makes the experience proximal to the reader and generates empathy.
- (b) Uses of contrasting poetic diction - The first stanza uses metaphorical or figurative diction (seal, earthy). The second stanza uses bare, clinical language.
- (c) Variation of tone and mood – In the first stanza, the tone is light-hearted, even contented. The second stanza displays a sad, pensive tone. The mood shifts from a dreamlike effect to one of desperate consolation.
- (d) Ironic contrast created by the two stanzas.
- (e) Poetic devices : rhyme (abab)

It seems to create contrasting effects. In the first stanza the rhyme creates discordant effects:  
Eg- Seal-feel, fears – years

In the second stanza the rhyme seem to create concordance. Eg- force-course, sees-trees.

- (f) Metrics – Metrical variation is used for creating the difference between illusion and reality.
- (g) Tropes and figurative language. Spirit Seal (the speaker’s total ignorance of the frailty of the human condition) Earthly years (the mundane as opposed to the mystic or spiritual)
- (h) The single powerful emphasis on ‘diurnal’ (day to day). Lucy revolves with the earth, as a part of the natural force.

#### **4.9.8 Themes and Issues**

A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal raises issues related to nature and man’s relationship with nature. Lucy the creature of nature apparently becomes one with nature after her death. She is integrated with nature.

*Rolled round....*

*With rocks and stones and trees.*

The speaker being (absolutely) human is apart from it. A slumber had sealed his spirit. His consciousness – mind and feelings were in a state of abeyance. (slumber and not sleep is significant) But being human he has consciousness.

Nature has no such consciousness. It is routine, mechanical but nevertheless a force.

*Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course*

It has intrinsic dynamism and Lucy is part of it.

The poem also hints at the sublime – the profound and transcendental. Lucy the child of nature is idealized. She could not feel the touch of earthly years. She is contrasted with the speaker who is human with all human frailties – eg: innocence/ naiveté.

Death is also an issue. Between the first verse and the second is a death. Lucy dies. But she is rolled round in earth’s diurnal course. As Boris Ford says she is now secure (freed from human death) in inanimate community with the earth. The mundane or the physical as against the spiritual or the sublime seems to be indicated.

## 4.10 To a Snowdrop

William Wordsworth

### 4.10.1 Overview of the Poem

This sonnet belongs to the series of sonnets Wordsworth wrote between 1803-1814, like most of his poems, 'To a Snowdrop' also addresses nature - a simple flower insignificantly growing wild in the woods. It is unique because it is the first flower of spring, hemmed in with snows and white as they". The idea that it is not popular or accepted is conveyed in the simile like an unhidden guest. The snowdrop blooms while the climate is still hostile.

*Storms, sallying from the mountain top waylay*

*The rising sun*

But the poet- persona in his typical simple, humble manner in responding to the natural welcomes the snowdrop. To him the snowdrop represents the fight for survival. In spite of all threats and obstructions it still blooms.

*“Whose zeal outruns his promise”*

Being the very first flower of spring, it faces weather which is still hostile. But its life span is very short. It withers in no time. And its place would be taken by brighter flowers like the jonquil – fragrant and overpowering. By that time the climate has changed and the weather friendly:

*Soft west wind and his frolic peers*

The jonquil has a better reception – it is a popular flower and cherished. But to the poet-persona the Snowdrop is precious. He calls it ‘chaste’. Snowdrop, the adjective creating metaphorical connotations. It is pure white and grows and blooms under difficult conditions like a woman who has to protect her virginity/ fidelity under trying conditions. This idea of chastity is further strengthened by the words. “Modest grace.”

The poet persona has respect and regard too for the Snowdrop for braving hostile conditions of existence.

*Venturous harbinger of spring*

It is the snowdrop that announces the arrival of spring – the end of the cold, dark winter. But since its life span is so short it also makes the poet aware of the shortness of life itself. There is a parallel between the life of the snowdrop and the life of man. Hence it is a monitor. It keeps under observation the passage of human life too. (Perhaps warn) but it is done through a gentle manner by making men think. The snowdrop is a reminder to men about the shortness of human life.

#### **4.10.2 Structure of the Poem**

To a Snowdrop is a sonnet in the Petrarchan mode – with an octave (the first eight lines and a sestet (the last six lines). The octave typically poses a question – the status of the Snowdrop. It is tiny and insignificant, it has come too soon, while the winter traces are still on – “hemmed in with snows” – “like an unbidden guest” (unwelcome guest). The flower seems to be apologetic too – bend thy forehead (contrition, shame, humility!) The rhyming scheme is a regular abba, abba. The sestet which asserts a stance/ reality rhymes bccdbd.

In the octave, the poet addresses the flower direct and shows empathy with it, personifying it. He invests certain qualities in the snowdrop – its resilience, patience, ability to face hardships, even obstruction (hemmed in with snows!) But it has the forbearance (bend thy forehead, as if fearful to offend). It is conciliatory, even apologetic (that it has come too soon) and it stands its ground in spite of strong forces (storms waylay the rising sun) although warmth is denied to it. The personification gives the snowdrop a human personality- simple humble men who have a dignity of their own. This representation is in keeping with the romanticism of Wordsworth, whose poetic mission was to write about ordinary men and women whose worth he saw, as opposed to the privileged.

But with the passage of time, nature threw up other flowers, brighter, more beautiful and fragrant. The newcomer is treated more generously (soft west wind and his frolic peers). The weather has become more friendly. This seems to be the ways of nature and forms the nature of man – acceptance and regard for the beautiful, the socially elite, those with status. Yet the poet recognizes the singular qualities of the Snowdrop – its modesty, its fidelity – its virtue. (Chaste Snowdrop!). It dawns insight in the poet (the inward eye), for the snowdrop makes one observe (warn!) the passage of life. The snowdrop struggles to bloom, but withers quickly (Its zeal outruns his (sun’s promise!)) The sestet ends on this note of reality.

### 4.10.3 Techniques

(a) Wordsworth selects the sonnet form to convey his theme, which is the brevity of human existence, illustrated by a natural object – the snowdrop. In the octave he notes the qualities of the snowdrop – specially its determination to bloom, its resistance in the face of hostile conditions and its quiet dignity (bending its forehead!).

He addresses the flower as a person giving it human personality – the humble (ordinary) men of the world.

(b) Wordsworth uses personification which make the natural situation represent the human context. Not only is the snowdrop personified it is given a character – humble and dedicated to his mission (zeal) the snowdrop is also represented as a messenger (harbinger) who takes risks (venturesome) to deliver his message. It is also the thoughtful monitor (observer/warner) of the shortness of life and reminder of that fact. The jonquils are also personified presumably as the privileged (bright and odours lavishing on the soft west-wind). They are welcomed by the very elements of nature (west wind and his frolic peers) storms are given human characteristics as well (they sally forth from the mountain tops!) they waylay (rob) the rising sun which through its representation as a simple wayfarer/ traveler becomes human. The month of May too becomes human. It is blue-eyed. This might suggest favour. The snowdrop blooms in early March with the dawn of spring but the jonquil appears almost at the end, when the environment becomes warm.

(c) “Like an unbidden guest is a simile used in the poem to convey an attitude and empathy. So is white as they.

(d) The following phrases are metaphorical as they create new meanings and nuances.

- i. "Hemmed in" (restricted /obstructed) suggesting the snowdrops struggle to grow and bloom (at another level it signifies the simple and humble people who are rejected by privilege)
- ii. "Zeal outruns his promise" the snowdrop's struggle to live is curbed by nature!)
- iii. " his frolic peers" (reference to the breezes that blow during May) the personification is accompanied by a character of playfulness.

- iv. "Venturous harbinger " (the idea that the snowdrop takes a risk in blooming at the time it blooms)
  - v. "Pensive monitor" (the word pensive creates a nuance (thoughtful or reflective) It makes the observer think of the shortness of life!
- (e) A number of visual and auditory images are used:
- i. Lone flower coming out of the earth while the snow is still on the ground.
  - ii. Storms blowing from the mountain tops.
  - iii. Month of May which makes other flowers particularly jonquils bloom.
  - iv. The jonquils are also fragrant. (olfactory image)

#### **4.10.4 Issues and Themes**

Nature of course is the central theme like in so many other poems, the simplicity (even hiddenness) of nature is discussed. Certain qualities are attributed to the snowdrop – its resilience, its determination to survive, its didactic mission. Along with the reflections on nature, the idea of the shortness of human life is also dwelt upon.

Wordsworth suggests the inequalities of society – the difference between the privileged and the non-privileged. The gap between the rich and poor, the powerful and the humble.

He also seems to remark on certain human qualities to which he gives value. Eg: modesty, simplicity, spiritual strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

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## 4.11 An Ode to a Nightingale

**John Keats**

### 4.11.1 Introduction to the poet

John Keats (1795-1821), one of the most famous romantic poets was born in Moorgate, London and was the son of a stable worker and had three siblings. His father died in an accident in 1804 and his mother died of Tuberculosis in 1810. After leaving school He apprenticed with a doctor. He was initially an avid student of medicine and also read much on natural history. Keats discovered his gift for poetry after reading Edmund Spenser's 'Faerie Queen'. When Keats started writing poetry he gained an immediate following, most notably, Leigh Hunt, another lesser known romantic poet who edited a literary magazine called 'The Examiner'. Percy Shelley was another admirer of his poetry, and went on to become a great friend. In 1818 Keats completed his epic poem 'Endymion'. He travelled to the Lake District in the same year. During this time unknown to him, he was becoming ill with tuberculosis. Keats had to return from the Lake District when his younger brother also fell seriously ill with TB. Keats looked after Thomas until he died. Soon after his brother's death he met and fell in love with a young woman, Fanny Brawne. They shared an emotional passionate relationship despite his fatal illness.

In 1819 he wrote a series of great odes of which one was the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. The other four odes were Ode to Psyche, Ode to autumn, Ode on a Grecian Urn and Ode on Melancholy. 1819 was a very prolific year for him, in which he wrote and published a considerable body of poetry. During this time his illness steadily worsened. He died in Rome in a room near the Spanish Steps and is buried in a Protestant cemetery in the city. Keats's writing took place only during the last five years of his life but he is considered to be one of the greatest English poets.

### 4.11.2 Overview of the Poem

Throughout the poem what we have is the poet's expression of his need to escape. In the first stanza the poet speaks of heartache and addresses a nightingale that he hears singing who he calls a 'light-winged' Dryad of the trees'. The poet first seeks to escape through the use of

'hemlock' or 'some dull opiate'. In stanza two escape is associated with 'The draught of vintage' or alcohol. In the third stanza, the poet expresses his desire to fade away, which would enable him to forget the troubles of the human world which the nightingale has never known: "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of human life. There is also a realization that everything is mortal and therefore impermanent as "youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies," and "beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes." In the fourth stanza, the speaker tells the nightingale to fly away, and he will follow, not through alcohol ("Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards"), but through poetry, which will give him "viewless wings." In stanza five it appears that he has succeeded in joining the bird imaginatively. The imagined world described in the rest of the stanza is dark and the darkness is sensuously alive with the fragrance of flowers. The poet who cannot see in the darkness, must rely on his other senses. This leads to an intense sensory experience. In stanza six the poet contemplates death as another means of escape. Keats moves from his awareness of his own mortality in the preceding stanza to the perception of the bird's immortality in stanza seven. The poet says that the nightingale's songs have been heard since ancient times by ancient emperors as well as clowns. In the poem as a whole the nightingale represents qualities that makes it alluring to the poet who is dreaming of escape: its happiness in stanza one, its ignorance of human suffering in stanza three and its perceived immortality. At the end of stanza seven he says the nightingale's song has had the power to charm open magic windows looking out over "the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn." The word "forlorn" brings the poet back to reality and to a preoccupation with himself. The bird now no longer a symbol and is in fact the actual bird that was heard in the first stanza. The poet, like the nightingale, has returned to the real world. As the nightingale flies farther away from him, the poet laments the failure of his imagination in which he can no longer distinguish whether the nightingale's music was "a vision, or a waking dream. The poem ends with the poet wondering whether he has had a true/transcendent insight (vision) or whether the vision he has experienced is false.

### **4.11.3 Structure and style**

In this poem Keats uses the genre of poetry known as an 'Ode'. As a poetic form the ode has several features: it is lengthy, deals with serious subject matter, employs an elevated diction and style, and has an elaborate stanzaic structure. Odes written by English poets were based on classical Greek and Roman prototypes. Pindar, a Greek poet who is credited with developing the

form of the ode, modelled his odes on the choral songs of Greek drama. These odes could be classified as encomiums, which were written to give public praise, usually to athletes who had been successful in the Olympic Games. English poets also turned to the odes developed by the Roman poet Horace for inspiration which were more personal and meditative.

The Romantic meditative ode was developed from these varying traditions. It tended to combine the features of the Greek and Roman odes. The odes written by the romantic poets are characterized by their development of subject matter. There are usually three elements:

- the description of a particularized outer natural scene;
- an extended meditation, which the scene stimulates, and which may be focused on a private problem or a universal situation or both;
- the occurrence of an insight or vision, a resolution or decision, which signals a return to the scene originally described, but with a new perspective created by the intervening meditation

These features can be seen in ‘The ode to a Nightingale’ as well – where the song of the nightingale leads the poet to meditative contemplation. Like most of the other odes, “Ode to a Nightingale” is written in ten-line stanzas. The stanzas in the ode follow the rhyming pattern ABABCDECDE which is Keats’s most basic rhyme scheme throughout the odes. The language used in the poem is very formal and decorous as is appropriate for this particular form of poetry. Keats did not attempt to write in the language of “rustic men’ as Wordsworth did.

#### **4.11.4 Techniques**

- The poem can be considered a sensuous poem as it is full of reference to sensations ( sights, sound, taste)
- Synaesthesia is a poetic device used by Keats where he combines different senses in one phrase (e.g Sunburnt mirth, Blushful Hippocrene). Mirth and merriment are abstract feelings that cannot get ‘sumburnt’ and Hippocrene is a fountain in ancient Greece that cannot blush)

- Borrows imagery from nature (summer, the woods, night sky, the countryside)
- references to the gods of ancient Greece and Rome (Lethe the river whose waters made the drinker forget, Dryad the nymph of the trees, Flora the Roman Goddess of Flowers, Bacchus the Roman god of wine)
- Use of poetic devices such as personification (the Queen moon sits on her throne) alliteration ( deep-delved, beaded bubbles) assonance (beechen green)

#### **4.11.5 Themes**

- According to Flynn (1988) the ode is driven by the passion for escape, brilliant indulgence in that escape, and by a closing insistence that attempts at escape are ‘deceiving’ and a ‘cheat’
- The yearning to find happiness and meaning through poetry
- The notion that human joy and suffering are inextricably linked
- Awareness of sickness and mortality
- There are also several features of romantic poetry that can be found in Keats’ poem:  
the power of imagination, delight in natural beauty, the close association between natural beauty and poetic inspiration, the journey of self- discovery

## 4.12 Spring and Fall

### Gerard Manley Hopkins

#### 4.12.1 Introduction to the poet

**Gerard Manley Hopkins** (1844 –1889) was an English poet who belonged to the Victorian era. He converted to Catholicism, when he was at University and later became a Jesuit priest. Hopkins did not achieve fame as a poet during his own life time. His poems were discovered only after this death when they were published by his friend Robert Bridges. One of his most famous poems was “The Wreck of the Deutchland.” His manipulation of poetic meter and his daring and innovative use of language makes him belong more to the 20<sup>th</sup> century rather than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nature and religion and the connection between them were the major themes of his poetry.

#### 4.12.2 Overview of the poem

In “Spring and Fall” the poet addresses a young child, Margaret, who is weeping when she sees the trees shedding their leaves in autumn. The child is too young to understand that this is a natural phenomenon, hence the tears as Goldengrove becomes bare as the natural environment prepares for the onset of winter. The poet suggests that as Margaret grows older and as she loses her innocence and her ability to respond to nature that she will not be moved by the same phenomenon as when she was a child. However she will be able to realize that the root of her sorrows lie in the fate of all natural things, which is to decay and die.

#### 4.12.3 Themes of the poem

The poem illustrates the innocence of childhood and the changes that take place when one becomes an adult. “Spring” with its associations of freshness are linked to the young child. The poem suggests that the child responds with direct and unfettered emotion to the trees shedding their leaves in autumn. Margaret is also unable to articulate the underlying reason as to why she is crying which is that ‘leaves like the things of man’, will share a common fate. As a child she has only an intuitive understanding of the nature of mortality. The poem suggests that as an adult.

Margaret will cease to be affected by this natural phenomenon (her heart will become 'colder') However she will have a more conscious realization of the fate that will befall all of us. Margaret will realize what she is weeping for

"It is the blight man was born for,  
It is Margaret you mourn for"

Hopkin's use of the word "blight" with its associations of death decay is notable. The use of the word 'fall' to refer to autumn also has a biblical resonance as it is a reference to the fall of man and the loss of innocence as Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden. Nevertheless it is important to note that "sorrow's springs" are the same. Which means that one's grief as a child or an adult are essentially found in the same source which is sadness in the face of our mortality. Hopkins, as in many of his poems, uses nature as a source of inspiration and the subject matter of this poem.

#### 4.12.4 Structure and Style

The poem can be characterized as a lyric- which is an expression of emotion. In this poem we see the sight of the weeping child leads the poet to an expression of deeply felt sentiment which culminates in a mature contemplation and a greater awareness of the condition of man. The poem consists of a series of couplets marked by similar end rhymes. The final couplet clinches the central message of the poem which is that when Margaret mourns for the shedding of leaves, in reality she is weeping for her own fate.

#### 4.12.5 Techniques

One of the most striking features of the poem is Hopkins's innovative use of language. There are several words that are 'coined' to convey with great precision the sentiments that he is trying to express.

- *Unleaving* is a word coined to describe the trees being stripped of their leaves
- *Leafmeal* is linked to the word 'piecemeal' which suggests a lack of order. This word helps us visualize the autumn leaves as they lie on the ground in a haphazard fashion

- *Wanwood* is also a word used to describe the sickly pale colour of the fallen leaves

We also notice several instances where he plays with the structure of a line.

eg: You with your fresh thoughts, care for can you?

How would this line of verse be written in a more conventional way? What is the effect of this change? One feature you will also notice in this poem is that rhythm supports the impression of a speaking voice which is a hallmark of lyric poetry. The particular rhythmic pattern that is Hopkins' distinct contribution to poetry is known as "sprung rhythm". Regular poetic meter has a set pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line, but sprung rhythm is constructed from feet in which the first syllable is stressed and may be followed by a variable number of unstressed syllables.

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## **4.13 Remember**

### **Christina Rossetti**

#### **4.13.1 Socio – cultural back ground of poem**

This is one of the poems that were written during the Victorian age, by one of the most influential poetesses of the time, Christina Rossetti. She is considered to be the best woman writer after Elizabeth Barrett Browning and has produced more than five collections of poetry during her life time, together with two collections of fiction. Rossetti was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite movement spear headed by her brother and his friends. Her poetry is also important for their strong religious overtones and also for their preoccupation with morbidity, death and decay. This poem is considered to have been written during a period of brief courtship which was not successful and Rossetti's desire to be remembered, beyond mere death and its decay are strongly expressed.

#### **4.13.2 Introduction to the poet**

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) was born in London to parents of Italian decent and lived her whole life in the city and its environs. Her family, highly educated and consisting of artists, poets and writers influenced her literary career from her childhood. She was educated by her mother at home and was later influenced by the Oxford movement the family converted to Anglo- Catholic church. This influenced almost all of Rossetti's work and her poems have been noted for their deep religious meaning and imagery.

Rossetti's poems regained their popularity in the 1970's with critical interest in her personal biographic details and her representation of female suppression in her poems. Renewed interest in her poetry was also sparked by feminist interventions that read her poems as an example of repressed female genius amidst the constraints of patriarchy. Rossetti's work has had a great influence on the 19<sup>th</sup> century poets such as Virginia Woolf, Philip Larkin, Gerard Manly Hopkins, and Elizabeth Jennings.

### **4.13.3 Overview of the poem**

Remember is a short poem written as a Petrarchan sonnet in iambic pentameter, consisting of an ABBA ABBA octave and a CDE CDE sestet. The short sonnet form conveys the meaning crisply and Rossetti repeats the word remember throughout the poem highlighting its importance to the overall meaning of the poem.

The narrator of the poem requests his/ her beloved to remember him/her after his/her death. The octave ( first eight lines of the sonnet) accepts the inevitability of death and the ultimate end, of being forgotten by the people around you. The narrator has renounced everything earthly and wishes only to be remembered, because as s/he claims, it is too late for anything, even for prayers. This acceptance of the inevitability of death and the need to be remembered by the people around you changes subtly in the Volta (the break between the octave and the sestet). Here s/he wishes to be erased completely from the memories of his/her lover, because even remembering will be painful. This need to be free from any earthly connections, echoing the Pre-Raphaelite beliefs of renouncing all the human desires, encourages the lover to forget and be happy rather than to remember and be sad. This idea is stressed in the sestet, through a repetition of the idea of forgetting and smiling because even being remembered as a thought might bring sadness rather than fond memories.

### **4.13.4 Structure and style**

The poem is written using Petrarchan sonnet form which uses the rhyme scheme consisting of ABBA ABBA octave and a CDE CDE sestet.

### **4.13.5 Techniques**

Rossetti uses repetition to heighten the importance of remembering as opposed to forgetting. The word remember is repeated several times throughout the poem. The important issues of afterlife and the inevitability of death are highlighted through the use of repetitive sentiments expressed through phrases such as 'far away', 'silent land', and 'no more'. These phrases amplify the morbidity discussed through the poem and the inevitability, and the finality of death. Rossetti also uses very simple language together with a conversational tone to bring out a very deep meaning that grapple with the ideas of death and afterlife.

#### 4.13.5 Issues and themes

**Physical body vs eternal soul** – This is one of the prominent themes of this poem. The decay of the mortal body and the afterlife of the soul, in its eternal form are questioned. Rossetti renounces the eternal quality of the remembered mortal body by requesting to be forgotten, but still her repeated insistence to be remembered alludes to the eternal soul that survives beyond mortal memories.

**Remembering vs forgetting** – This is once again an extension of the previous concern of mortality and immortality of memory. Rossetti highlights the importance of remembering but not of the mortal body or memories, but of the immortal soul that is beyond ‘darkness and corruption’. Remembrance is requested as long as it does not bring pain to the person remembering, while forgetting is requested to bring peace not only to the dark memories of the deceased, but also of the living.

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## 4.14 Suicide in the Trenches

### Siegfried Sassoon

#### 4.14.1 Socio- Historical background

The immediate background of the given poem is World War 1 which took place between the years 1914- 1918. This conflict was unprecedented in many ways given its nature and scope. This war witnessed new developments such as mechanized warfare and trench warfare. The scale of human carnage was also unprecedented. 'Suicide in the Trenches' is one of the poems in which Sassoon conveys his response to the devastating conditions created by World War 1.

#### 4.14.2 Introduction to the author

Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967), is one of the most famous war poets that emerged from the devastation of the First World War. Sassoon was himself a soldier who belonged to the upper ranks of the military. Despite his rank, Sassoon's sympathies were with the common soldier who had to contend with the horrors of trench warfare. Sassoon was very critical of the military hierarchy, politicians and even the civilians who remained safe in power and comfort far away from the battlefields and sent young men off to die in battles that seemed futile and pointless. His most famous collection of antiwar poems was "Counterattack". He was a friend of Wilfred Owen and it is said that he influenced Owen's development as a war poet.

#### 4.14.3 Overview of the poem

The poem consists of 3 stanzas and each stanza deals with one phase of the life of the young soldier. In the first stanza there is reference to the young soldier as a 'boy' this suggests that he is barely an adult. He is portrayed as being full of carefree vigour, singing with the lark. It also appears that this young man is 'simple' not sophisticated or educated and therefore vulnerable. He is also by nature happy and optimistic and unfettered by any fears as he '*sleeps soundly through the lonesome dark*'. It is also significant that the first stanza is linked to springtime which is traditionally associated with youth and vitality.

In the second stanza we move to a completely different setting. He is now in the trenches and this is a complete contrast to the images of spring and vitality. It is now winter, which is traditionally associated with death and desolation. The boy is no longer happy and carefree and is

now ‘cowed’ and glum’. The experience of the war has transformed him in a very tragic fashion. There are references to ‘crumps’ which is the sound of artillery shells falling on the ground, lice which is a perennial feature of trench life and alcohol which would be the only way of deadening the terror of trench warfare. Here we are also given the images of the boy committing suicide. He has been driven to this desperate act due to the horrors he has witnessed.

In the third stanza we find the perspective has widened and the setting has shifted to a very public scene where war is being celebrated by the civilian population ‘*you smug-faced crowds with kindling eye/who cheer when soldier lads go by*’. It is clear that the poet is clearly critical of civilians who valorize war without understanding the horror and tragedy that it wreaks on young lives.

#### **4.14.4 Techniques, Structure and Style**

The poem consists of three stanzas made up four lines each. Each stanza is made up of rhyming couplets. For example boy/joy, dark/ lark. The poem also has a very regular meter and is reminiscent of a nursery rhyme. The use of alliteration can be found in the first lines ‘simple soldier’ boy which contributes to the sing song like quality of the first stanza. There is irony in the fact that the nursery rhyme form is used to describe something that is horrific which in fact intensifies our response to the suicide of the young soldier.

The use of alliteration can be found in the first lines ‘simple soldier’ boy which contributes to the sing song like quality of the first stanza. The choice of lexical items like trenches, crumps and lice is very effective in creating images of the battle front. Personal pronouns such as “you” are used to implicate the reader as well in the guilt we should all feel in sending young people off to war.

#### **4.14.5 Issues and themes**

The poet want to convey the horrors experienced by the soldiers at the warfront which are a far cry from the traditional notions of glory in the battle field. He also conveys his criticism of the civilian population and its hypocrisy when they valorize the soldiers thus sending more off to die a futile death.

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## **4.15 Among School Children**

### **William Butler Yeats**

#### **4.15.1 Socio – cultural back ground of the poem**

The poem “Among School Children” is believed to have been composed in 1926, when Yeats was well known name. He is believed to have compiled this after visiting a Convent School in Waterford in Ireland. While the poem begins with an observation about the young girls who were awed by the poet’s visit to their school. Then the poem moves away from direct observations to a reflection about a young girl he knew and to a philosophical reflection about life, youth and the creative process.

#### **4.15.2 Introduction to the poet**

William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939) was one of the foremost literary figures of the 20th century. He was born in Ireland and was well known as a pillar of the Irish Literary Revival. He was educated in London and studied poetry from an early age. He was also fascinated by Irish legends and the occult, which influenced his early works. His later works were more influenced by physical and realistic subject matter and with the cyclical theories of life. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.

#### **4.15.3 Overview of the poem**

The poem consists of eight stanzas of eight lines each. Each stanza focuses on a different thematic issue that connects the poem together to inquire into the cyclical nature of life and the inevitability of death.

The first stanza discusses Yeats’ visit to the Convent. He is accompanied by a nun who answers his questions and he observes these children being taught. The children too are awestruck by this public figure walking in their school and look up to this sixty year old white haired smiling gentleman.

In the second stanza he is reminded of another young girl. He refers to her as a Leda, invoking Greek mythology. (According to the Greek myths, Leda was the mother of Helen of

Troy and was an extremely beautiful woman whose beauty attracted Zeus' attention. Zeus seduces Leda in the form of a swan and Yeats re-enacted this through his famous sonnet "Leda and the Swan" in 1923.) The Ledaean beauty he mentions in this stanza is a reference to his childhood friend and love Maud Gonne. He recalls how as a young girl, trivial incidents in the school room have influenced the life of his friend and mentions how their lives become interconnected, like the white and the yolk of an egg through the sharing of such experiences.

In the third stanza he imagines Maud as a young child and sees her in the little girls he sees in the school. As he declares, even the daughters of kings can have things in common with the poorest of the poor within these convent walls. He makes references to the myth of Leda and the Swan again with the mention of "daughters of the swan".

Stanza four takes a philosophical turn with Yeats' comparison of Maud's present appearance to her past. He reflects how the young beauty has changed into a withered old lady and how he himself has changed from a young man to an old person.

Stanza five extends the philosophical musings and questions the unconditional love of a mother towards her child despite the child's inevitable physical changes that will come one day.

Stanza six continues on the same vein about human frailty that comes with old age. He uses the famous Greek philosophers Aristotle, Plato and the mathematician Pythagoras to discuss how even the mighty will end up old and feeble, despite fame and brains.

Stanza seven once again sheds light on human spirit and its belief in things beyond their grasp, symbolised by a mother's love for her child and a nun's love for God. Both expect great things through their worship of the absolute form of love, but are going to be eventually disappointed, because life cannot be perfect.

Stanza eight ties the personal and the universal theme of the poem by questioning whether we can separate life into sections and achieve perfection and love or whether we should love life with its many imperfections such as old age and decay. This stanza also poses the fundamental question of can humans separate life and its many forms of love from each other, such as whether we can separate the dancer from the dance.

#### 4.15.4 Structure and style

The poem comprises of eight stanza each containing eight lines and employs a rhyme scheme, ababaabcc, known as ottava rima. This poem is also an example for Yeats' use of graceful and rhythmic language. He uses the first four stanzas to talk about the personal and extends the same metaphor to incorporate the universal concerns of life, love and death.

#### 4.15.5 Techniques

This poem uses stanzas comprised of eight lines. The eight stanzas can be roughly separated into two main sections of which the first is about the personal reflections while the second part is about universal observations. There are many references to the Greek myth of Leda and to well-known philosophers and their philosophical ideas. These cross references make the poem more nuanced and have in-depth meaning beyond the obvious message.

#### 4.15.5 Issues and themes

- a) The inevitability of death
- b) How youth will eventually lead to old age and old death
- c) The inseparable connection between life, love and death
- d) How life should be enjoyed not in parts but as a whole since love and despair are both intertwined in the journey of life

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## **4.16 Morning at the Window**

**T.S Eliot**

### **4.16.1 Socio-cultural background**

Much of Eliot's poems are set against the backdrop of the early decades of the 20th century. This was a time that was pervaded with a sense of disillusionment and malaise due to the socio political and economic changes that were characteristic of this age. The industrial development and rapid urbanization in western countries led to the growth of large cities which were overcrowded and had very poor living conditions. Furthermore there was also the imminent threat of war. Artists in particular responded to these new and troubling condition by making these the focus of their literary work. 'Morning at the Window 'is one such vision of city life where the poet is trying to convey his sense of despondence with the urban landscape.

### **4.16.2 Introduction to the Poet**

T.S Eliot (1888 – 1965) was a poet critic and dramatist. He was born in St Louis Missouri in the U.S. and later settled in England. Eliot occupies a very important place among the modernist poets who experimented with style and technique to create poetic forms that would accommodate their views of modern life. One of Eliot's most critically acclaimed works was his four part poem "The Wasteland" which is an exploration of the conditions of modern life that he sees as a moral and spiritual wasteland. It has been acclaimed as one of the masterpieces of modern literature. His tragic vision of modern life also finds expression in shorter work like "Preludes" and "Morning at the Window" Eliot composed "Morning at the Window" in early September 1914 he was living in England and working as the assistant for "The Egoist" magazine and as World War I was breaking out. In his later years he turned to religion, becoming a member of the Church of England and began to explore the notion of religion as one of the only means of gaining solace.

### 4.16.3 Overview of the poem

“Morning at the Window” contains a series of miniature observations about modern urban life and its inhabitants. We are exposed to the sights and sounds of modern society as well as the psyche of its inhabitants. Against this pervasive vision of despair we are offered a brief glimpse of hope in the form of a smile of a passerby –but this too is momentary.

### 4.16.4 Themes

The title “Morning at the Window” by itself is paradoxical because it sets up expectations of a poem that is going to deal with the freshness and beauty of the morning. Instead, we are presented with scenes which are actually an antithesis: the sound of dirty plates being rattled in basement kitchens, the housemaids hanging around outside the properties where they are employed and the pervasive brown fog. These observations are also made by a detached onlooker, who is not an active participant – who is separated from the scenes that are being described. This condition of detachment appears to be symptomatic of the material conditions of city life. Furthermore the inhabitants of the city are referred to by the non-descript pronoun, “they”. These people are stripped of any individuality and could be city dwellers in any urban landscape.

One of the key influences and inspiration for this poem comes from the French poet Baudelaire whose work Eliot knew and admired. Baudelaire, especially in his most famous poem “Fleurs du Mal” (flowers of evil) explored the distinct conditions of the urban metropolis and also delineated the responsibility of the poet to capture and embody the fleeting ephemeral conditions of modern life. In his own poem, Eliot too makes modern city life the subject of his poetry and attempts to confer significance and meaning to the mundane conditions of urban existence and to bring out some of its redeeming transcendent qualities. This unique vision finds expression in this particular poem in the fleeting smile which is ‘torn’ from that passer-by, which lingers for a moment before vanishing ‘along the level of the roofs.’ This brief human exchange although short lived must be set against the general despondence and apathy that is the predominant mood of the rest of the poem.

#### 4.16.5 Structure and Style

In 'Morning at the Window', Eliot adopts a traditional poetic form to embody his unique vision of modern life. The poem is fashioned in the basic shape of the Spenserian stanza – namely, nine lines ending with an alexandrine. (Traditionally, an alexandrine is a longer 12-syllable line, the standard pentameter one.) This stanza form was used by the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-99) throughout his epic poem 'The Faerie Queene'. However, Eliot subverts the expectations created by this traditional poetic form used by Spenser to celebrate heroic deeds against an idyllic pastoral backdrop of fairyland, by presenting the sordid images of street in the city. A further point of difference is that unlike Spenser's stanza form, Eliot's is unrhymed. Part of the impact of this poem lies in the use of a traditional poetic form to explore the conditions of modern life.

#### 4.16.6 Techniques

The poem consists of a series of images that are meant to capture the essence of urban squalor: The subterranean images of 'basement kitchens', the discordant sounds created by the onomatopoeia of 'rattling breakfast plates, the housemaids standing at area gates and the surreal image of the ocean like 'brown waves of fog' that affords brief glimpses of the 'twisted faces' of passersby. All these images combine to create to a sustained vision of modern life which is has a nightmarish quality. The poet's choice of diction is also notable in its contribution to the overall effect. The word 'damp' used to describe the souls of the housemaids, with its associations of mould and decay convey to us the quality of existence of people who seem to have no passion or feeling. Under these conditions their souls can only 'sprout' which is a form of germination rather than lush growth.

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## **4.17 Design**

### **Robert Frost**

#### **4.17.1 The Socio-cultural Background of the Poet**

Robert Frost ( 1874 – 1963) - Robert Frost's life saw the passage of the United States of America through the reconstruction era, the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era. It includes the rise of industrialization and the resulting surge of immigration.

This was a period of rapid economic growth, which saw the US become the world's dominant economic- industrial and agricultural power.

Politically the U.S. emerged as a united and powerful nation, after winning the secessionist war decisively in 1865. Reconstruction brought about the end of legalized slavery but freed slaves became 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens, and remained so for another eighty more years. The country was dominated by the Republicans after 1900 with the assassination of president Mackinley. The progressive era brought political, social and business reforms (expansion of education, higher status for women, curtailment of corporate excesses, and modernization of many areas of government and society). There was an unprecedented wave of European immigration between 1865-1918 – 27.5 millions new arrivals in fact. They provided the labour base necessary for industry and agriculture.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the U.S. had become a leading global industrial power building on new technologies (eg: telegraph and steel), an expanding railroad network and abundant natural resources, ushering in the second industrial revolution.

U.S. further consolidated the territories of Mexico, Alaska and Hawaii after wars with Spain and agreements with other countries.

The U.S. supported the Allies in the First World War.

The post-war period was one of sustained prosperity for America – but as the Great Depression set in, agriculture collapsed. It revived and U.S. withdrew from active interference in worldaffairs. It was forced to intervene in the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war to support Great Britain, China and Russia. U.S. emerged as the super power after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Although U.S. made the highest goals in the political and economic fields becoming the world's super power the growth of monopolies and cartels in agriculture and industry, created economic issues. Rural farmers cultivating traditional family –run units found it difficult to compete with big companies as railroads and land speculators drove up the price of land. Large scale farming soon took over from the family farms, increasing agricultural yields but displacing many farmers. Industrial workers received very low wages. Working conditions were inhuman and dangerous and had very little legal protection. Neither the agricultural nor the industrial workers were properly organized. This led to wide gaps in the social structure.

The lasting peace ushered in after the unification of the country at the end of the civil war and the subsequent economic prosperity brought on upsurge in culture and literature. Rapid transcontinental settlements and changed urban, industrial conditions introduced new themes, new forms, new subjects, new characters, new regions and new authors in the post-civil war period. With the growth in printing newspapers and magazines had wide circulation. Many of the writers of this period started as journalists or began their writing careers publishing in newspapers.

American authors of this period increasingly adopted the form of realism in their fiction. Fiction was the more prolific and popular genre. It reached great heights with writers who followed a chain of excellence beginning with Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, H.D. Thoreau, Louisa M. Alcott and Mark Twain.

Excellence in poetry was realized by poets like Emily Dickinson and Stephen Crane. The short story was given form and impulse by Edgar Allen Poe.

American authors expressed disillusionment following world war I. Scott Fitzgerald captured the mood of the 1920s. Dos Passos and Hemingway wrote of the war. American drama reached international standards in the 1920s with dramatists like Eugene O'Neill, followed by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller.

From the end of World War II, notably until the 1960s end, saw the flowering of the most popular creations in American Literature. Eg: Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mocking Bird'. Writers like Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller wrote about the acute realism of human suffering in the world war.

Between the birth and death of Robert Frost, American identity had been established as a unique one, with all genres of literature developed to fruition.

#### 4.17.2 Introduction to the Poet

President J.F. Kennedy said of Robert Frost:

*“He has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever gain joy and understanding.”*

Robert himself expressed the movement within his poems as one extending from joy to insight.

Daniel Hoffman observes that Robert Frost’s early work reflects the ‘puritan ethic turned astonishingly lyrical’ and enabled to say the sources of its own delights in the world.

He designated Frost as the American Bard:

*“He became a national celebrity, and a general performer in the tradition of that earlier master of the literary vernacular, Twain”*

Frost wrote from his grassroots knowledge of American life and this knowledge was gained by lived experience.

Robert Frost was born in March 26, 1874 in San Francisco, where his parents had moved from Pennsylvania after marriage. His father died when he was eleven and subsequently he moved with his mother and sister to Lawrence, Massachusetts. At high school he became interested in reading and writing poetry.

He enrolled at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire in 1892 and later at Harvard. He left Harvard without a degree.

Frost drifted through a string of occupations – teacher, cobbler and editor of the Lawrence – Sentinel. His first published poem ‘My Butterfly’ appeared on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1894, in The Independent, in New York. In 1895 Frost married Miriam, a college friend who had inspired him. The couple moved to England in 1912 after many failures in New England.

In England, he met such poets as Edward Thomas Rupert Brooke and Robert Graves. Frost also established a friendship with Ezra Pound who supported him in his writing. He returned to the U.S. in 1915. By that time, he had published two volumes of poetry.

Frost is often seen as a poet of traditional verse forms and metrics who was aloof from the poetic movements and forms of his time.

But Frost is not a mere regional poet. He probes the psychology of situation and reflects on the human condition as much as the better held poets of his time.

The author of searching and often dark meditation on universal themes he is quintessentially a modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken in the psychological complexity of his portraits.

#### **4.17.3 Overview of the Poem**

Design seen as a perfectly executed sonnet by critics is also seen as Frost's greatest poem. The title refers to the idea that God's existence has from time immemorial been held to be proved by certain natural facts.

'Such mutual fitting of things diverse in origin argued, it was held; and the designer was always treated as a man loving deity.' The idea of a benign deity is mentioned in Matthew 10.29, which teaches that God oversees every aspect of the world, even the most common creature. The idea of a perfectly created world also appears in Genesis 1:31 where "God saw everything that he has made, and behold. It was very good." But Frost seems to question this position. In various poems and creative works the spider is seen as a symbol of both good and evil. (eg: Whitman's 'A Noiseless patient spider and Robert Lowell's Mr. Edwards and the Spider) Frost uses the spider to emphasize the evil aspect of God's design and offers as Randal Jarrel observes "An Argument from Design with a vengeance. If a diabolical machine, then a diabolical mechanic in this little Albino catastrophe."

In 'Design' the usual benign design is overturned. Spiders are normally black and the heal-all (a medicinal flower which become ironical here because it provides a death bed to the moth) is blue, and the moth is brown. But here they have changed colour in an eerie manner. What is

found is freakish. The spider, fattened by a previous victim, holds a dead white moth like a rigid piece of satin cloth (reminiscent of a rigid waxy corpse) in a coffin. The three characters representing death and blight are ready to begin the morning rite (echoing rite – an evil rite, an evil sorcery of transformation)

Frost seems to ask what evil force made the blue flower white and what evil power brought the spider into deadly conjunction with the moth. He seems to question the benignness of the creator and the creation “What but design of darkness to appall/ If design govern in a thing so small?”

In a *Dust of Snow*, Frost shows the darkness of the creation, the evil side of life which co-exist with the good and positive. Here he draws attention to the underlying evil.

In the creation / in the scheme of things Frost’s sonnet presents a formal philosophical problem. He demands reasons for the strange combinations of existence. What is the design behind these incongruities he seems to ask? (The freakish white heal – all, the white spider and the white moth – which have broken the rules of normality). The answer is:

What but design of darkness to appal?

If design govern in a thing so small

There is uncertainty and doubt about the universe itself. The universe is not only unknowable but also treacherous. There is lurking evil and danger in it (White which is held to be pure and innocent hides in it hidden evil and fear)

#### **4.17.4 Structure and Style**

Structurally ‘Design’ is regarded as a clear model of the American emblem poem. Its movement “from sight to insight” reflected in the conventional division of the sonnet into octave and sestet and underlined by the typographical separation of the two parts. The encounter with the natural emblem in the octave is presented as a personal experience. The poet is wandering alone in nature and the time is early morning. “Many of Frost’s darkest insights into the natural order occurs at the emblematic moment when night descends; but the impact of the macabre scene in the sonnet occurs at the most memorable season of the day..... the awakening hour”,

when the poet encounters these “Assorted characters of death and plight/ mixed ready to begin the rooming night.”

In the course of the octave the poet introduces “assorted characters of death and blight” ‘a dimpled spider, fat and white, a white flower and held up by the flower, ‘a moth/ like a piece of satin cloth.’ The three are introduced separately assembled in synthesis to demonstrate the incongruity of their relationship, and then re-described in the last two lines of the octave for emphasis:

A snowdrop spider, a flower like a froth,  
and dead wings carried like a paper kite.

He raises queries about the strange combinations of existence. In the sestet the poem simultaneously invokes and questions the tradition of the argument from design. In the eleventh and twelfth lines the poet seems to invoke the tradition of American nature writing :

What brought the kindred spider to that height  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?

The final couplet rings in and questions the nineteenth century poetic tradition of providential design.

The octave heightens and makes an ironical comment on the experience, the sestet simultaneously invokes and questions the tradition of the argument from design. The last line raises questions about whose design it is, whether that of God’s or nature or darkness, on the one hand, or that of the observer on the other. The ‘design of darkness’ or of nature or of God is the design made by the perceiver, by the poet. Only the human eye can perceive the design in the natural world – and in that world the potential hostility and violence of the physical world.

#### 4.17.5 Techniques

- (a) The poet uses the form of the sonnet – Octave and Sestet structure with a provocative question in the last line.
- (b) Use of imagery- specially use of contradictory pictures-
- i. a white heal – all suggests purity and safety though it implies the white of the swollen spider.
  - ii. a satin- white moth seemingly attractive – but rigid, is too frozen, too easily reminiscent of rigor mortis or the stiff shining satin of a coffin.
  - iii. There are images of springtime freshness (snow-drop, flower-like) and the spider (the fragility of froth does not conceal the link with venom)
- (c) Metrical features
- i. Use of the iamb in line 1 and 4.
  - ii. Alternated stressed and unstressed syllabies.
  - iii. Alternated syllables (O's and I's)
  - iv. Same end rhymes (line 9)  
(equation of rhyme and i sounds. Eg – night, blight, height)
  - v. Variation in tone  
  
Octave – (1-8) teasing and light hearted.  
  
Sestet – serious, thinking. Ironic puzzlement.
  - vi. Irony – the difference between what is seen and its meaning (the imagery suggests a situation of innocence and purity but it is really a sinister, evil one)
- (c) Synecdoche – what is seen as design is only a part of a whole – the whole evil design of nature/ life/ creation.

#### 4.17.6 Issues and Themes

Design raises profound issues related to the creation / nature/ perception and event artistry.

Frost explores ‘design’ in its many faceted meaning : as plan or art / or pattern and plot or evil attempt (conspiracy?)

The title refers as William James writes in *Pragmatism* (1907) ‘God’s existence has from time immemorial been held to be proved by certain natural facts ..... such natural fitting of things diverse in origin argued design, it was held and the designer was always held as a man loving deity. What is expressed (in Mathew 10:29, Genesis 1:31) is God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. This is echoed by Blake (Did he smile his work to see? Did he who made the lamb make thee? ) Frost seems to critique this position, because in *Design* the ‘natural’ is overturned. The normally black spider and the blue heal all (ironical here) are both wickedly white. The spider fattened by a pervious victim holds a dead white moth like a rigid piece of satin cloth (or a rigid waxy corpse) in a coffin. These three characters of death and blight (like elements of a witch’s broth) are ready to begin the morning rite (echoing rite). Frost asks what evil force made the blue flower white and what malign power brought the spider into deadly conjunction with the moth. Randal Jarrel describes it as an ‘albino catastrophe’. Frost questions the stance of a perfectly created world for here is aberration and evil. Frost asks :

“What but design of darkness to appall.

If design govern in a thing so small?

For such evil to exist the universe has to be Godless – or that God himself is evil/ there is nothing enhancing in this piece of nature. It is ‘a design of darkness’

Frost poses a series of questions which suggests that the universe is unknowledgeable and treacherous.

The poem represents a startling apparent violation of the natural order – the colour codes are all violated and the colour that is violated is that of purity and innocence. Consequently a grim contrast is established between the potential innocence and the actual horror of the scene.”

What Frost apparently sees is the ‘shaped whiteness of design’. But it turns out to be not the whiteness of normal design but the ‘design of darkness’. The effect is to frighten. Frost is not

only questioning the whole conceptual basis of the creation, but also the American poetic tradition of providential design.

The poem also raises questions about poetry and artistry. It is the poet's design that we see here- his craftsmanship – his perception. It is design that rouses us. Whether it is the design of God or Nature. He sees the 'design' and questions it. It is concerned about the fact that the seemingly innocent and beautiful could be evil and dark and dangerous.

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## **4.18 Money**

### **Philip Larkin**

#### **4.18.1 Socio – cultural back ground of the poem**

This poem which was written in 1973, reflects the consumerist opinions of the public and the importance accorded to money as a means of acquiring modern comforts. The ‘Oil Crisis’ of 1973 began as a result of the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) proclaiming an oil embargo on the countries that were exporting oil. This was mainly put in place as a response to the US and its support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War. But other European countries too were affected and Britain, though not directly affected by the Oil Crisis and the embargo of the OPEC, Britain faced its own crisis during the same period. There was a series of strikes by coal miners and railroad workers over the winter of 1973–74 which destabilised the British economy as well as paved the way to a government change. Larkin’s poem reflects these changes that were taking place in the society as well as the importance and the unnecessary prominence given to money and consumerist behaviour during this period.

#### **4.18.2 Introduction to the poet**

Larkin wrote about the stunted lives of people around him in post-war Britain and explored the spoiled desires of people that were a direct result of post-war consumerism and the rising commercialisation. He was also considered a member of “The Movement”; a collection of writers who were against modernism and who wanted to preserve the English values. They preferred rationality over emotions and presented realistic views about the self and the world. Their works were nostalgic about the earlier Britain and contained pastoral images of the decaying way of life in Britain. While Larkin was considered part of “The Movement”, his poetry were not anti-romantic or overtly nostalgic about the lost past. The English values presented through most of Larkin’s poems and his preoccupation of the uncomfortable experiences of modernism and the modern age characterised him as a member of ‘The Movement’.

### 4.18.3 Overview of the poem

*Money* is a poem where the use of money, especially the different ways money function to give meaning to life is being critically analysed. Written as a first person narrative, the narrator uses a conversational tone to describe the impact of money on his life. The poem is written in four stanzas, concentrating on different aspects/ attributes of money. In the first stanza, money, personified in the poem, mocks the narrator for just saving it, rather than spending it to acquire modern luxuries. In the second stanza, the narrator reflects on how he has not spent his money and how the others around him have benefitted from spending money, rather than saving it. There is no tone of regret, on the part of the narrator, expressed through this stanza, but there is a subtle hint of criticism against all the consumerist values that the society has adopted through its addiction to money, and especially spending. All the trappings of the modern society are achieved by spending money, and not saving money.

In the third stanza, the protagonist compares money and life. He alludes to the impermanence of both the entities. Just as much as you cannot postpone enjoying life until you retire, the miserly saving of every penny you earn (bank your screw) cannot guarantee anything but the final shave in the coffin. The criticism is again very subtle, yet scathing. He is critical of the unnecessary importance given to consumerist habits of his contemporary modern society.

The final stanza drives the point home: the impermanence of wealth and luxuries gained through money and the underlying truth of life and its sadness. The stanza and its enjambments highlights the mundane quality of life, even with the trimmings of modern life. Ultimately it is a sad and a mad life full of mundane concerns that lack depth.

### 4.18.4 Structure and style

The poem uses four stanzas to describe different aspects of money and its impact on modern life. The conversational tone and the first person narrator emphasises the importance of the theme and also the unspent, unfulfilled desires of consumerism in the aftermath of the Oil Crisis.

Larkin uses very plain language, and maintains a simple rhyme scheme of aabb except for the first two lines of the first stanza. The use of conversational style and the sudden full stop in the first line of the fourth stanza emphasises the importance given to money and consumerist values.

The enjambments in the final stanza highlights the mundane, cluttered lives of modern people, who have fallen prey to the consumerist modern values disregarding their traditional life styles and especially the British values.

#### **4.18.5 Techniques**

**Plain and sceptic language-** Larkin uses very simple, plain language devoid of sophisticated truths and images to convey his message. His use of the language, in its everyday form enhances the meaning conveyed through the poem, by highlighting the banality of everyday life. Sceptic language, representative of British humour enhances the sarcasm he tries to impart through the poem about people's attitudes towards consumerist values propagated through modernism.

**Simple rhyme** – The rhyme scheme used in the poem is extremely simple complementing his overall message that is devoid of great philosophical truths. He uses a simple rhyme scheme further to heighten the relevance of the poem to the everyday common people and their values, changing rapidly with modernism in the post war British society.

**Conversational** – The poem uses conversational language, once again alluding to the main subject matter of the poem, the common people and their changing value system. The rapport between money and the protagonist is effective in developing the tension between consumerism and old value systems that are represented by the protagonist.

**Use of everyday imagery** – Larkin uses everyday imagery of crowded suburban landscapes, banal settings and everyday transactions of everyday people in his poem to once again highlight the poem's relevance to daily life and its very simple truth, of consumerism and the effects of modernism.

#### **4.18.6 Issues and themes**

**Criticism of consumerism** – The poem uses the image of money and the changing values that are taking over the old values in the post-war British society due to the importance given to money and consumerism. Consumerism in its mindless form of acquiring riches is criticised in a very sarcastic manner through the image of a suburban town that looks intensely sad. Larkin

criticises the importance given to money as a mode of amassing many consumerist riches that have no lasting value or a lasting presence.

**Impermanence of money / modern values and life** – The poem is critical of the changing values that are becoming increasingly consumerist. It also brings to focus the impermanence of money and the riches acquired through money.

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## 4.19 Phenomenal Woman

### Maya Angelou

#### 4.19.1 Socio-cultural background to the poem

The poem “phenomenal woman” is taken from Maya Angelou’s third volume of poetry called *And Still I Rise* published in 1978. Angelou is an American poet, memoirist and a civil rights activist. She is best known for her autobiographical book *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* which received international acclaim. Having written over 30 books, she remains one of the most recognized and inspirational African-American voices in the world, for having examined race and gender in the United States.

As an African-American woman growing up in the thirties and forties, Maya Angelou experienced the double burden of racism and sexism in the South. It was an era when African American women who lived in black communities were subject to both the rules of the whites as well as black men. Hence, they were doubly discredited, and their contribution to society devalued. In general, black women have tended to see racism as a more powerful cause of their subordination than sexism. Further, while white women were seen as delicate, feminine, respectable and virtuous, African-American women were seen as unwomanly, primitive, lustful, physically strong, domineering, and dirty. Angelou’s poem is an effort to counter such demeaning stereotypical representations of Black women through the celebration of the Black woman.

#### 4.19.2 Introduction to the poet

Maya Angelou was born in 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. She was born as Marguerite Ann Johnson and experienced sexual abuse and rape when she was eight years old. This led to her becoming mute for over five years. During the traumatic years of silence, she immersed herself in literature as solace. When she was 12, she spoke again and went on to excel in school. Later she moved to New York and became a member of the Harlem Writers Guild and thus began her journey of writing. She also became a Civil Rights activist and worked for Martin Luther King. In her memoir *I know why the Caged Bird Sings*, she deals with her early years up to 17, and boldly speaks of her courageous survival of rape, early pregnancy and racism in

America, which resulted in the text being banned in certain districts. Angelou died in 2014 at the age of 86.

#### **4.19.3 Overview of the poem**

In *Phenomenal Woman*, Angelou discusses the beauty and power of the black female body. Eurocentric standards of feminine beauty have tended to devalue and marginalize the Blackfemale body as “unfeminine”. Angelou presents a woman who flaunts and accepts her body, and in turn, gains visibility and empowerment. The first-person speaker of the poem repeats that she is a phenomenal woman, and argues that she is worthy of the attention she receives. With each stanza, she lists her phenomenal attributes such as the “span of my hips” and the “swing in my waist”—all of the things that make the speaker, a woman, who she is.

The first stanza lists the physical attributes of the speaker that make her appealing. She argues that while she lacks the traits that society judges to be beautiful, she nevertheless is attractive. She also consciously calls herself phenomenal.

The second stanza further builds on this argument and presents the speaker as irresistible to men as well as dominant. Men are compared to bees who swoon around her the way they would a hive of honey. She seems to suggest that her attractiveness is not just because of her physical self but because of her inner self.

The third stanza states that even men cannot determine what exactly it is that makes her seductive. She asserts that men cannot grasp her “inner mystery”, and thus she further elevates herself.

In the fourth and concluding stanza, the speaker speaks directly to the reader and states: “Now you understand/ Just why my head’s not bowed/ I don’t shout or jump about/ Or have to talk real loud”. This suggests her confidence in her own definition of self, which results in her receiving attention naturally because she is a woman.

#### **4.19.4 Style and techniques**

The poem consists of four stanzas in free verse written in the form of a ballad, without a conventional rhyme scheme. There are times when Angelou uses some rhyme such as her opening couplet, yet rhyming is irregular. Each stanza ends with a refrain.

#### **4.19.5 Issues and themes**

As indicated above, the entire poem is a celebration of the uniqueness of the beauty of Black women. Black women have been pressured to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards that value white women as the ideal of beauty. In such a context, Angelou seems to argue that accepting one's own self is not only a strategy of resistance, but is also a journey to self-discovery, where women can hold their head high with pride and confidence. She suggests in that black women do not have to meet standards of appearance based on Eurocentric assumptions to deserve respect. Despite her refusal to conform to the Eurocentric beauty paradigm, she attracts attention nevertheless. As such, the speaker asks that women should shed the pressure of such standards and embrace their true, authentic selves and thereby, set themselves free.

## 4.20 *An Introduction*

### Kamala Das

#### 4.20.1 Socio-cultural background

Kamala Das is a leading Indian poet, memoirist and short-story writer who gained prominence as an Indian-English writer. A prolific writer, she is also one of the foremost short story writers of Malayalam. She is known for her frank depictions of female desire and sexuality and is considered as a revolutionary poet who introduced intimacy and personal experiences into poetry. Breaking many a taboo with her poetry, she questions, through her poetry, the domestic and sexual oppression of Indian women. Thus her work and life have been iconic, where her own life inspired many of her literary themes. With over 20 books, which include several collections of poetry, short stories, six novels and three memoirs, *An Introduction* by Kamala Das is a poem from her collection of poetry titled *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*, published in 1973.

It is important to discuss Indian English writing in order to better understand Kamala Das as a poet. Indian English literature, the body of work in English by writers of India who write in the English language, began with writers such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, and have now incorporated writers of the Indian diaspora such as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, and Vikram Seth. They have dealt with varied themes such as colonialism, nationalism, the freedom struggle, East-West conflict, multiculturalism, gender and race. Although Indian women writers have been traditionally undervalued, writers such as Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai have earned international recognition for their work. They too have raised many issues such as the dilemma of being a migrant, quest for identity, alienation, rootlessness, and hybridity. Of these, issues pertaining to the role of women have occupied a central place in women's writing.

Yet prior to the rise and success of the novel, poets such as Das have been pioneers in expressing similar issues and concerns through the English language. While writers of the mid twentieth century mostly articulated colonialist concerns, Das, writing in the fifties and sixties, employs her poetry to explore predominantly the position of women. Yet Das's innovativeness lies in her going beyond. As a young wife and a mother at only 16, Das herself was a victim of patriarchy and tradition which sanctioned female exploitation through arranged

marriage. Das uses the medium of poetry to protest and rebel against societal restrictions and taboos, and reawaken her stifled identity. She writes about love, betrayal, and anguish. She celebrates female sexuality, and recounts even the frustrations of her own marriage. As such, she is brutal in her sincerity and honesty, and is identified as a confessional poet, and has been seen as one of the most controversial women writers in India.

#### **4.20.2 Introduction to the poet**

Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiya, was born in 1934 in Malabar, in the state of Kerala, to a highly literate, conservative Hindu Nair family of Royal ancestry. Her father, V.M. Nair, was an ex-managing Editor to a Malayalam Daily, and her mother was a Malayali poetess. She received a private education till she was 15, and was given in marriage at 16 and subsequently had three sons. However, since her love of poetry was very strong, she began to write at an early age, and wrote in both English, and Malayalam, under the penname “Madhavikutti”. However, she did not limit herself to poetry but also wrote fiction and non-fiction, which included several memoirs, the most famous being “My Story”. She also courted controversy when she converted to Islam in 1999. She died in 2009.

#### **4.20.3 Overview of the poem**

An Introduction reveals the attitude of Kamala Das to poetry and life, through her discussion of the life of a woman in a search for self-discovery and self-exploration, in a patriarchal society. It is also personal and autobiographical as it seems to address issues encountered by Das herself, the female poet who chooses to write in the English language. As such, it can be categorized as a confessional poem, exposing and unraveling herself.

The poem begins with the speaker stating that although she is not aware of the intrigues of politics, she nevertheless is familiar with the names of politicians, and establishes herself as a brown-skinned Indian of Malabar. Next she probes the charge that she writes in a foreign language despite being an Indian. She refutes the charge insisting that although she writes in a language not hers, she has adapted it to suit her own self and therefore has made it her own. She states that although the English language that she speaks “is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps”, now “voices my joys, my longings, my/Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing/ Is to

crows or roaring to the lions”. As such, she argues that the English language is now an absolute part of herself, which is instinctive, and the medium of expression of her emotion.

Afterwards, she describes growing up, becoming a woman and notes her first shocking sexual encounter which leaves her humiliated. In response, she writes how she rebels by being non-conformist and becoming a tomboy, defying societal expectations of a woman, which decree that she ‘Dress in sarees, be girl/Be wife... Be embroiderer, be cook/Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in”.

Finally she recalls how she “met a man, loved him. Call/Him not by any name, he is every man/Who wants. a woman, just as I am every/Woman who seeks love”. She suggests that the relationship is as fruitless as her initial experience, and that she is frustrated as he is a product of patriarchal society which is rigid and unyielding. She concludes by attempting to figure out who he is, and determines that as a woman, she will remain both “beloved” and “betrayed”, forever unfulfilled.

The poem is in free verse with no clear rhythmic pattern and adopts a casual, colloquial style and tone. With regard to images, it uses vivid and effective imagery. For instance, the poet equates her appropriation of the English language to the act of a crow “cawing”, an image which is simple, ordinary and familiar in an Indian context, and therefore, appropriate to suggest her ease with the English language.

#### **4.20.4 Themes and Issues**

Das’s poem discusses a woman’s quest for identity and highlights various facets of alienation of a woman. Although she proudly affirms her Dravidian identity by stating “I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar”, she is continuously alienated from and at odds with societal norms and conventions. The poem deals first with her desperate attempt to rationalize her linguistic choice in writing and speech. This refers to the linguistic legacy of colonialism where writers in most post-independent nations are blamed for writing in the colonial language which is seen as a tool of cultural subjugation. Das refers to the nativisation of English where English is no longer oppressive but liberating when it is Indianized to suit the writers context. She, defiant, embraces the language, be it half English or half-Indian, as “human speech”, expressing her own sensibility.

Next she discusses her quest for love and fulfillment which is abruptly halted with her own sexual suppression as a woman. Her words, “he drew a youth of sixteen into the/Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me/But my sad woman-body felt so beaten” seem to suggest her own child marriage at 16, and the subsequent anguish and humiliation and denial of self. Yet the speaker is again defiant and rebels, and rejects her assaulted female identity through a rejection of female attire and instead attempts to embrace a more empowering image in a patriarchal society. But she is once again blamed for being nonconformist.

Yet her unyielding quest for fulfillment continues and she defines herself as “a woman, just as I am every/Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste/Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans’ tireless/Waiting”. Hence, she celebrates her sensuousness, and is unashamed of her quest for love and satisfaction. Yet her fulfillment does not lie in her lover or “every man”, and the poem ends on a note of longing and yearning, and a realization of the complex, varied, contradictory and infinite search for fulfillment of a woman. What is striking in the last few lines is that although the poem first attributes the “I” to the lover, she later hijacks it and declares in her concluding line that “I too call myself I”. Therefore, the poem seems to end with a strong sense of female self-assertion.

## **References**

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## 4.21 Fisherman mourned by his wife

Patrick Fernando

### 4.21.1 Socio – cultural back ground of the poem

The socio-cultural backdrop of this poem is specific to Sri Lankan contexts. The background is a village in a coastal area of Sri Lanka in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also refers to a setting where many socio-economically downtrodden people's lives in fishing villages are subject to environmental factors such as tides in the sea. Besides, the context is also socio-culturally specific because it alludes to traditional marriages - where a young groom is proposed to a very young prospective bride-to-be through adults, and the couple do not meet each other until the ceremonial wedding. Thus, not only their wedded life, but also their understanding and relationship begin upon the ceremony, and often they become parents without delay.

### 4.21.2 Introduction to the poet

Patrick Fernando (1931 -1983) - a Sri Lankan poet who won international recognition - is considered as one of the accomplished poets in Sri Lanka writing in English. By referring to Sri Lankan writers in English, Rajiva Wijesinha writes in 2006 that “new writers have emerged but [...] we have not yet witnessed the development of a compelling voice, and the canon as it were consists still of the ten writers I have named in this introduction”(iv); Patrick Fernando is among this canon of the ten writers. Fernando's “meticulous, mannered poetry’ was well-inspired and shaped by his western classical learning and literature”(Bhushan).

### 4.21.3 Overview of the poem

In D.H. Lawrence's short story *Odour of Chrysanthemums* (1911) - set in a mining town in England - a wife named Elizabeth Bates, after waiting for her husband's arrival from his place of work from a mine, at the end of the day, comes to know that her husband is dead. The story reveals Elizabeth's reflections about their marriage, death and family; she seems to feel alienated and is terrified about the future. Similar to this story written in 1909 in England, Patrick Fernando presents in the poem ‘The Fisherman mourned by his wife’ a young wife's lament – her thoughts and feeling - upon the unexpected, untimely death of her young husband. The fisherman who went out to sea in rough weather for fishing to earn the family's day -to-day

earnings is dead now. Through the wife's memories at the death bed of her husband, the poet reveals that the life-style the couple experienced, their love, marriage, sex, and children. What is also implicitly reflected is the socio-cultural and economic background of the society they live in. In other words, the poem describes the typical lifestyle of the people in a fishing village in Sri Lanka where women as well as men marry young through arranged marriages which lack mutual understanding or even affection before the marriage. However, with the arrival of children, the relationship gets developed and strong, as represented in, for instance, "but soon I was to you more than God or temptation", and "you had grown so familiar as my hand". At the funeral, the wife reflects on their past through reminiscences. Yet, unlike Elizabeth in *Odour of Chrysanthemums*, the unnamed wife in 'Fisherman mourned by his wife' seems confident to confront reality, as represented at the end of the poem – as the sky "cracks like a shell again", they "bring the hearse before the rain". She reaches emotional maturity gradually.

#### **4.21.4 Structure and style**

The poem is an elegy - a poem of serious reflection, a lament for the dead as voiced through the thoughts of the dead person's young wife. In other words, an elegy, which originated as a Greek metrical form, portrays three key stages of loss; (i) lament over the dead (ii) praise and admiration of the dead and (iii) solace and consolation. The wife here first expresses her lament through grief and sorrow as represented in "would you come hot with continence upon the sea...". Then she admires his understanding and support – "you had grown so familiar as my hand". Finally, her solace is represented through her awareness of the rain and the need to be ready for the funeral. Fernando employs the narrative style to reveal the story of the wife and the fisherman. It is through her stream of consciousness that her past is revealed to readers, while the present is depicted through dramatically – for instance, through people who attend the funeral. This is a well-constructed poem with a "definite style" and "local colouring", as stated in *GCE Advanced Level English Literature: Poem and notes*(74).

#### **4.21.5 Techniques**

The narrative strategy used in the poem is a significant technique. Coupled with it, is the flashback technique through which the wife exposes her stream of consciousness to readers and readers get to know her past through them. It is interesting to note that parallel to her stream of

consciousness, the present situation is also described in the poem. The use of repetitions and rhyming words to emphasis and to maintain the lyrical nature is a common technique in the poem. The use of symbols related to the sea and common to fishing villages is also seen to drive the message home. The line “chaste as a gull flying pointed home, in haste to be with me” is a fine example. Imagery drawn on senses, for instance, , **touch, sight, smell,** and **sound** is effectively used in the poem: “Gull flying pointed home” is a visual imagery while the cracking sky is an auditory image; people’s movements as in “men come and go” refer to kinesthetic sense.

#### **4.21.6 Issues and themes**

Although the poem is woven round a specific event of death experienced by a fisherman and his wife mourning in a fishing village in Sri Lanka, it reveals a universal theme on humane existence and experience – the fact that the life is impermanent, but people alive should let life go on, by understanding death but adjusting to the consequences of the departure of the loved ones. Thus, the poem is a blend of reality and philosophy. This is also about nature and natural phenomenon as tragic causes. Reminding readers of Tsunami experienced by many Asians including Sri Lankan in 2004, which caused death at a macro level, this poem also refers to a micro-level pathetic incident caused due to the tragic nature of the environment- the sea. What is also explicit through the narrative is the gradual emotional maturity of the narrator. At the beginning, as a young bride and a wife, her emotional immaturity is presented; this is especially reflected through her memories of their first encounter at the night of their wedding. Later at the end of the poem, the wife’s emotional maturity is demonstrated. Another significant issue is depicted through the poem’s title. As reflected through the title, it is the fisherman who is brought to the fore, not the wife; ‘The fisherman...’ Yet, paradoxically, what is exposed in the poem is the wife’s lament. Although Fernando admits and explains that his poems are “mostly of a personal and lyrical nature”, the poem ‘Fisherman mourned by his wife’ reflects the socio-cultural and economic dilemma articulated publicly. For instance, fishermen’s life assurance is a socio-political issue which is articulated publicly, and needs to be addressed by governments.

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## 4.22 Animal Crackers

### Richard De Zoysa

#### 4.22.1 Socio-cultural background

A celebrated journalist, poet, actor, broadcaster, and human rights activist, Richard De Zoysa was abducted and murdered in February 1990, on the beach at Moratuwa, aged 31. With strong Marxist leanings, De Zoysa was a progressive thinker, passionate about social and political reform. Such thinking is believed to have perhaps led to his subsequent murder. Although in his short lifespan, De Zoysa was able to write only about 30 poems, they remain poignant, and are driven primarily by a strong sense of social consciousness. *Animal Crackers*, written just two days after the 1983 riots broke out in Colombo on July 24th, is one such poem that vividly expresses his sense of political commitment to revolutionary social reform.

Widely known as the Black July, the events of July 1983 are significant for Sri Lanka as they triggered a series of events that would forever change the social and political landscape of Sri Lanka. 1983 witnessed Tamils being targeted with violence in Colombo and many other parts of Sri Lanka, as a response to the killing of 13 Sinhala soldiers in the North by Tamil separatists. Faced with arson and massacre, Tamils in Colombo began to evacuate to the northern and eastern provinces of the island, and subsequently abroad. While the Sri Lankan Government officials denied involvement with the race riots, the Government's inactivity suggested their undeniable involvement in the violence. The Black July became a strong motivation for recruiting Tamil militants, and thus fuelled the civil war of 26 years fought between the Sri Lanka Government and the Tamil separatists. With thousands of Tamils displaced, and many Sinhalese and Tamils killed as a result of the war, Black July remains as the symbolic beginning of the civil war in Sri Lanka.

#### 4.22.2 Introduction to the poet

Richard De Zoysa was born in Colombo and was of mixed ethnicity, his father being a Sinhalese and his mother a Tamil. Born into privilege and educated at S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia, De Zoysa emerged as a talented actor, which resulted in him being cast in leading Sinhala films such as *Yuganthaya*, in 1983. However, his unquenchable quest for social

justice led him to journalism and at the time of his murder, he was the Head of the Colombo branch of the Inter Press Service, a global news agency which focused on the marginalized and silenced peoples of third-world nations. As such, Richard De Zoysa was committed, outspoken and radical, a radicalism that cost him his life.

#### **4.22.3 Overview of the poem**

*Animal Crackers* satirizes the complicity of the Government which failed to deter the race riots in Colombo. Through the image of playing with a child, the speaker records the actions and motivations of the relevant parties involved in the riots of 1983.

The speaker in the poem is at play with a child, presumably his three year old son Dimitri, as indicated in the first line. The son requests the speaker to draw him a lion which he proceeds to do so. He casts the lion in yellow as lazy, and kind, having just emerged from deep sleep, irritated at being woken up. Next, he is asked to draw a tiger which he sets out to do so, in the form of those envisioned by Jim Corbett, the legendary colonial hunter and tracker, and William Blake, the Romantic poet. As the three-year old draws his plastic gun at the speaker, the speaker refers to the “hell” which envelops him where lions and their jackals have broken loose and are “infecting all with madness”. In order to distract the child away from the gun, the speaker suggests that he draw an elephant instead, which he sees as “curious” who lazily looks about, and remains emotionally detached from the chaos which surrounds him.

#### **4.22.4 Structure and style**

Written in free verse, the poem consists of one long stanza, where the lines vary in length. While there is no clear rhythmic pattern, the gradual progression from shorter lines to longer ones perhaps reflects the increasing violence of the events of Black July. The word “draw” is repeated, and is a metaphor for equating the act of drawing a picture to the action of drawing a gun.

#### **4.22.5 Issues and themes**

The poem begins with the description of a lion which connotes the Sinhalese majority whose emblem is the lion. The poem’s depiction of the lion as “lazy”, “kindly”, “indolent” and “biddable” seems to suggest the complicity and lack of foresight of the Sinhalese at the time of

riots. While mobs ravaged and ransacked the city of Colombo, the majority of the ordinary Sinhalese people, though horrified at the scale of violence, remained inactive, thereby sanctioning violence through their silence. The poem satirizes the lion who basks in “the sun of ancient pride” and who is now “cross at being awakened from long, deep sleep”. The poem’s depiction of the Tiger in “black bars on gold” connotes the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or the LTTE, the Tamil separatist militant group which fought for an independent homeland in the North and East. Yet the poem notes that “here there are no tigers/here there are only lions” suggesting the lack of power of the Tamils in Colombo.

The poem also condemns the politicians who supported the riots in order to further their own agendas. The image of the Jackals who run rabid seem to suggest the gangs who ran amok in the city, apparently with the support of certain hard-line Ministers of the Government. The jackals “infecting all with madness, as they pass” suggest how the violently intense, irrational and extreme actions of the mobs lead the urban Sinhalese poor to join in the bloodshed.

The harshest criticism falls on the image of the elephant which represents the ruling party at the time which was the United National Party, symbolized by the elephant. The poet is cynical and ironic in his representation of the Government’s complicity in the violence. The elephant “sways” in his “shaded arbour” and is untouched by the violence around him. His reluctance to “venture out” to “quell” the “rising flame” is attributed to his unwillingness to “burn his tender feet”. As such, De Zoysa is unforgiving in his depiction of the Government that was ruthless in its apathy and indifference to the sufferings of the Tamils, and turned a blind eye towards the violence. The poem appropriately concludes with an admonishment to his son to not look out of the window, where riots are in full swing. The speaker explains to his son that the commotion outside is only a “party” where “they’re burning/No, not a tiger-just some silly cat”. The poem seems to suggest the vulnerability of the Tamils who are now equated to cats, whose symbolic annihilation is celebrated by the “bonfire” erected by the rioting mobs. Thus the poem shows the sensitivity, honesty, maturity and mastery of De Soysa who is able to provoke a larger discussion on politics and violence through a simple metaphoric approach of a child at play.

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## 4.23 Cathedral Builders

### John Ormond

#### 4.23.1 Introduction to the poet

John Ormond Thomas was born on 3 April 1923 in Britain, at Dunvant, near Swansea. He studied philosophy and English at Swansea University, and at the same time studied painting at the Swansea School of Art.

His early verse appeared under the name Ormond Thomas, with work by James Kirkup and John Bayliss in *Indications* (1943). The advice of poet Vernon Watkins that he should not publish until he was 30 made him hyper-critical of his own work.

In 1945 he joined the staff of *Picture Post* in London.

He returned to Swansea in 1949, and for a while worked as a sub-editor on the *South Wales Evening Post*. In 1955 or 1957 he began a career with BBC Wales as a director and producer of documentary films. His films included studies of Ceri Richards, Kyffin Williams, Dylan Thomas, Alun Lewis and R. S. Thomas.

Ormond 'returned' to poetry in the mid-1960s, having destroyed much of his early poetry. He started publishing poems in the periodical, *Poetry Wales*. His first major volume, *Requiem and Celebration*, was published in 1969. His reputation was enhanced in 1973 by the appearance of *Definition of a Waterfall* and his inclusion in *Penguin Modern Poets*. A volume of selected poems was published in 1987.

#### 4.23.2 Overview of the poem

- The poem explores the lives of the men who built the Cathedral, their families and their fellow workers
- There is a human story behind the grand monuments which is often ignored
- The poet talks about the aging of the cathedral builders – from young men to old
- who are no longer able to engage with their work

### 4.23.3 Structure and Style

- This poem carries only one sentence – can be taken as a technique; may allude to the great work, untiring work, the target etc. etc.
- Detailed observations
- Varied range of diction
- Changes in poetic voice

### 4.23.4 Issues and Themes

- This poem suggests human perseverance and achievement; their untiring work and commitment in building cathedrals (“every day took to the ladders again”),
- A sense of pride in their achievement, in human work
- The poem seems to celebrate the ordinary cathedral builders
- Contemptuous attitude towards Bishops – (envied fat bishops )
- It suggests social exclusion as well
- This may also be a subtle criticism on the building of monumental cathedrals in the middle ages. Although it reflected faith of medieval society in Europe, excessive energy time , money , etc. spent in constructing may be of little use ;the discord of sacred activities that risk ordinary men's lives Sacred activitie that risk ordinary men’s lives
- The last line “I bloody did that””, may be read in two ways. Implies that their the vestments at the consecration; and it also adds to his pride as he has seen its completion, which is usually impossible as the task takes years and years, generations to complete
- As cathedral building is supposed to be a collaborative effort by many workers; the poem shows jealousy towards co-workers - cursed the loud fancy glaziers for their luck.

## 4.24 Unknown Girl

Moniza Alvi

### 4.24.1 Socio-cultural background

*Unknown Girl* is written by Moniza Alvi, a Pakistani-British poet and writer. Her poetry records the condition of growing up half-Pakistani and half-British in England, and the sense of conflict which arises as a result. Dealing with issues such as duality, alienation, isolation, dislocation, and fractured identities, Alvi has over 8 collections of poetry and a series of short stories.

Alvi's poetry belongs to the generation of Asian women writers in Britain which include writers such as Meera Syal and Sujata Bhatt. The UK has also witnessed the emergence of many popular male writers of Pakistani origin who have established themselves such as Hanif Kureishi and Nadeem Aslam. They mostly focus on diasporic communities in Britain and common characteristics of their writing are rootlessness, and the search for home and identity.

The twentieth century witnessed large-scale displacement and dispersal of populations across the world as a result of major political upheavals, such as the two world wars, and decolonization. In addition, due to globalization, information, and travel, the movement of people, commodities, ideas, and cultures across the world accelerated. Further, war, and ethnic conflict have also resulted in forced or voluntary migration, self-exile and expulsion. As such, the diaspora in the UK include complex mixes of peoples, and the UK has the largest Pakistani population outside Pakistan. The writers of the diaspora have attempted to express their diasporic existence through their writing, focusing on the causes and consequences of migration.

Alvi's work is a reflection of the condition of many writers who grapple with being haunted by a sense of loss over the home left behind. Alvi's condition is more problematic considering that one of her parents is of British origin. As such, having a South Asian father and a British mother, her sense of nationality is confusing. She is both an insider and an outsider. While Alvi is rooted in British culture, she is still denied acceptance as a Pakistani. Neither can she find her roots in her country of origin. In her writing, she grapples with her uncertainty over which culture to align herself with and the anxiety she feels when she is unable to make a connection with one

or both of her cultural backgrounds. It is this sense of duality of identity which we perceive in the poem.

#### **4.24.2 Introduction to the poet**

Moniza Alvi was born in 1954 in Lahore, Pakistan to an English mother and a Pakistani father. She moved to England when she was an infant and returned to Pakistan only much later after her first book of poems. She lives in Norfolk, and after having retired as a secondary school teacher, she is now a freelance writer and poetry tutor.

#### **4.24.3 Overview of the poem**

While Pakistan during her childhood was more a dream than a reality, Monica Alvi attempts to reclaim her lost past through her poetry. Her homeland is re-invoked in the poem, through the speaker's memories of her experience in India, of having her hand painted with henna.

The poem begins with a description of the setting. It is evening at a market place and a young girl in a market stall is hennaing people's hands. The speaker is having her hand hennaed with the picture of a peacock. As she sits, she describes the surroundings. Light begins to fade and the mannequins in the shop windows, the banners and ware begin to draw the attention of the speaker. As the design is completed and the peacock starts to unfurl itself, she claims she has "new brown veins" suggesting that she has rediscovered her connection to her culture of origin. The poem ends with the speaker's realization that while the henna design will fade, her desperate longing for her feeling of belonging will remain.

#### **4.24.4 Structure and style**

The poem is in the form of free verse, and the entire poem is one long stanza which is laid out differently. It contains many short sentences which result in a fast paced rhythm. The phrase "unknown girl" is repeated. A highly visual and sensory style is used to evoke the sights of the East.

#### 4.24.5 Issues and themes

The poem details a young girl's visit to the bazaar to get her hands painted with henna. Yet it is also about Alvi's search for her identity. The speaker depicted is perhaps Alvi herself who is desperate to find a thread of connection to her place of origin. Through the inscribing of the Peacock, the speaker gradually begins to reconnect with her culture and heritage, and thereby her sense of self. The Peacock and henna are both symbolic of Indian and Pakistani culture, and the setting is rich and exotic in color and vibrancy. Thus, while she positively re-assimilates with her indigenous cultural elements, she is also perceptive of the environment which surrounds her which include "dummies" with western perms, and banners of the Miss India pageant, both which speak of westernization of Indian identity. As such, duality not only resides in her English culture and in her own sense of self, but also in her land of origin. Her sense of comfort and intimacy with the "unknown girl" who hand paints her with care, suggests the speaker's natural embracing of her cultural origins. Although the poem ends with her realization that the henna will fade just as her sense of ease of belonging, it nevertheless ends on a positive note, reaffirming that the continuity of memory will rekindle the speaker's sense of belonging to India.

*When India appears and reappears*

*I'll lean across a country*

*with my hands outstretched*

*longing for the unknown girl*

*in the neon bazaar.*

## 4.25 Explosion

### Vivimarie Vanderpoorten

#### 4.25.1 Introduction

Vivimarie Vanderpoorten's *Explosion* is a poem from her first collection titled *Nothing Prepares You* published in 2007. Vanderpoorten's work belongs to the body of writing known as Sri Lankan literature in English, and she deals with issues such as gender, race, class, identity, struggle, suffering, war, politics and love. While *Nothing Prepares You* won Vanderpoorten the coveted Gratiaen Prize in 2007, she also won the 2009 SAARC poetry award for her work. Her second collection of poetry titled *Stitch Your Eyelids Shut* was published in 2010. Vanderpoorten continues to write, and at present, she is a Senior lecturer in English at the Open University of Sri Lanka.

#### 4.25.2 Biography

Vanderpoorten was born in Kandy to a Kandyan Sinhalese mother and a Burgher father of Belgian ancestry. The younger of two daughters, she grew up in Kurunegala and did her undergraduate study at University of Kelaniya. She has a MA and PhD from University of Ulster, UK. Currently, she works and resides in Colombo.

#### 4.25.3 Background

As *Explosion* is set against the backdrop of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, it is critical to discuss the event before unraveling the poem. The ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and the Tamil Hindu minority resulted in an ethnic conflict which began officially in 1983 and ended in 2009, with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by the armed forces of Sri Lanka. The conflict cost the lives of many, and resulted in thousands of civilians being displaced. While the conflict was mostly in the North and the East, between the LTTE and the Military, violence was manifest in other parts of the island as well, especially in the Sinhalese-dominated South, mainly through indiscriminate suicidal and time bomb attacks by the LTTE. Populated city areas and public transport were targeted and the deadliest bombing was at the Central Bank in Colombo in January 1996, killing many innocent

civilians. However, in the South, despite being affected by the sporadic violence, people were able to maintain a semblance of normal life, an aspect that the poem ironically questions.

Sri Lankan writing in English too needs to be noted in this context. While Sri Lankan writing in English originated in the early twentieth century, it achieved prominence only after independence in 1948 with writers such as Patrick Fernando, Yasmine Gooneratne and Anne Ranasinghe. However, it matured with events such as the insurgency of 1971, the ethnic riots of 1983 and the ethnic conflict which followed, and its aftermath, with writers such as Romesh Gunasekera, Jean Arsanayagam, Nihal de Silva, Shyam Selvadurai, and Nayomi Munaweera. While Sri Lankan writers who write in English have also dealt with other aspects not related to strife, the 26 years of war have gripped many such as Vanderpoorten.

It is also critical to discuss Vanderpoorten's mixed heritage, which compels her to navigate a complex identity. Kandyan Sinhalese, mostly inhabitants of the central and North Central parts of Sri Lanka, have traditionally separated themselves from low-country Sinhalese, in the belief that they are guardians of Sinhalese Buddhist culture and tradition due to certain historical factors. Burghers are a Eurasian ethnic group descended from the Portuguese, Dutch and the British and other Europeans who settled in pre-independence Sri Lanka. As such, they are more akin to western customs and traditions. Vanderpoorten, exposed to both the traditional and western, negotiates both worlds, and is privy to both worldviews. But it is also a fraught negotiation with tension and complexities as she is both and yet neither, straddling between both identities. Yet it is this unique perspective which perhaps provides Vanderpoorten with a distinct vantage point to reflect on life and reality.

#### **4.25.4 Overview**

*Explosion* deals with the central bank bombing which was carried out by the LTTE on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1996, in the city of Colombo, which killed nearly 91 and injured thousands. It was one of the deadliest terrorist attacks of the ethnic conflict, where a truck, containing explosives crashed through the main gate of the Central Bank, and a suicide bomber detonated the bomb which destroyed the bank and damaged buildings nearby.

#### **4.25.5 Form**

The poem is in free verse with some random rhyme, and consists of 3 stanzas. The language is casual and clear, which intensifies its emotional effect.

#### **4.25.6 Summary**

The poem begins with a description of the moment of the bombing when time stood still, and everyday activities came to a standstill, even the “cawing of the crows”. The mayhem which ensued is likened to a “prism of fire and fury”, helping the reader to visualize the devastation.

The second stanza details the destruction, where many died, and some were blinded, others scarred for life with severed limbs. It also describes how the retired workers collecting their provident funds were crushed under rubble, and how women in saris, presumably the employees, wounded and mutilated, with their “eyeballs in their palms” bloodied the streets.

The third and final stanza depicts a damaged car with a dead driver inside and how a radio commercial aired in the car radio for an insurance company announces “big or small, insurance/protects them all”.

#### **4.25.7 Analysis**

The poem brings to life the horror and the devastation of the bombing in a vivid way. It presents a series of scenes woven together to form an impressionistic account of the bomb blast. In the first stanza, the poem maintains a slow pace, suggesting how time stands almost still, contrary to the accelerated violence of the bomb. It is as if time is arrested by the bomb. Even the crow’s habitual caw is cut short, signifying how the natural world is also checked by the ensuing violence. The poem picks pace in the second stanza when it begins to detail a sequence of immediate events, perhaps to signify the mounting violence and devastation of the bomb. Most people are dead, some are blinded, others are crushed, limbs are severed and mutilated, eyes gorged out, and some are in traumatic shock, with memories “erased”. Focusing solely on the victims of the incident, the narrative perspective shifts rapidly from one scene to the next, creating a fragmented account of the incident. Its focus on the elderly pensioners is more poignant as it suggests the loss of hope and aspiration, even for the aged. The image of the

vegetable seller's severed hands, "like cucumbers", is a graphic image of the bomb's effects, and is evident of the poem's compassion for the suffering.

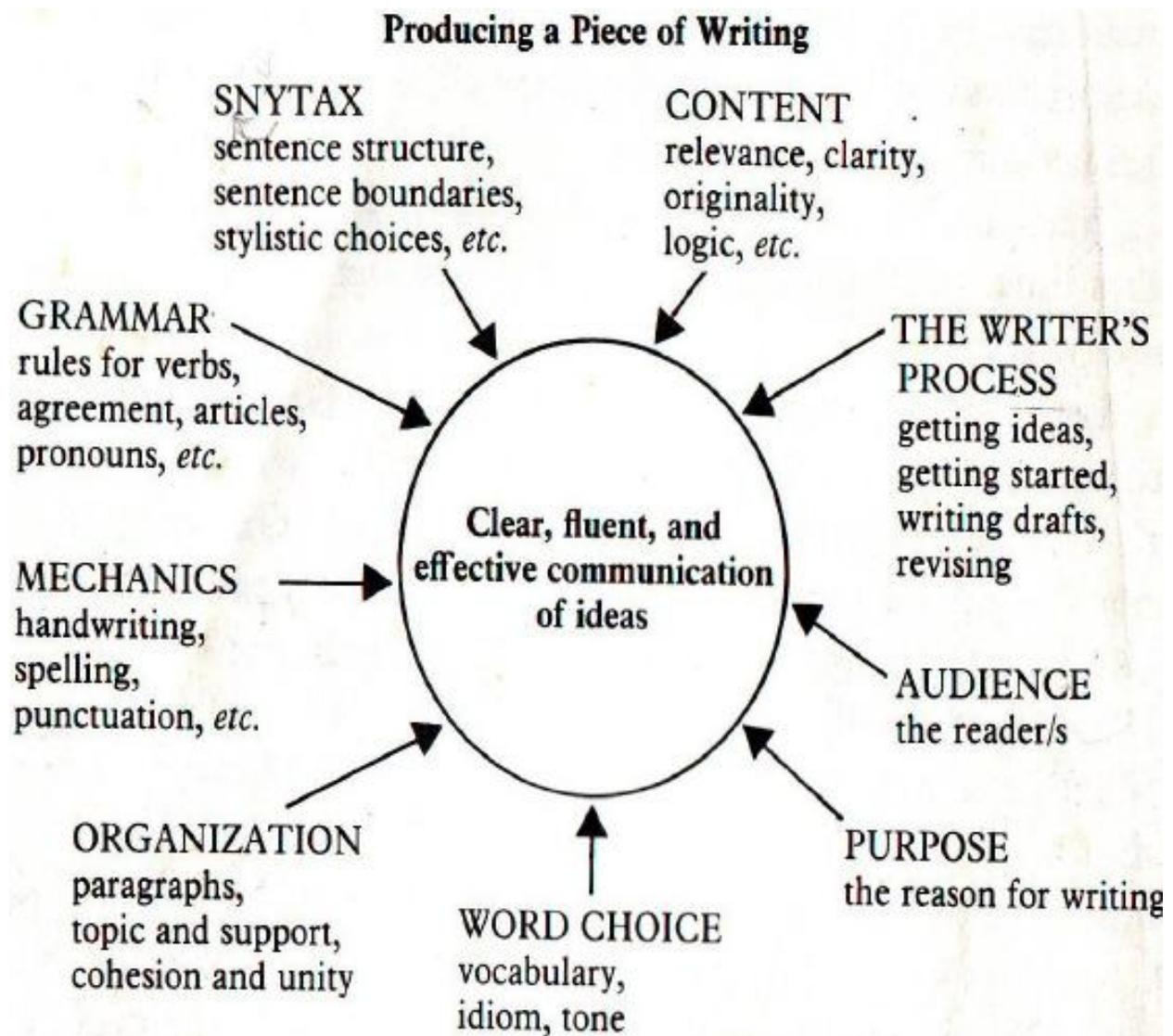
Yet while the poem chronicles the pain, it is also critical. What is significant is how it, in the third and final stanza, draws back from the violence and chaos, and focuses instead on an advertising slogan. While the first stanza already suggested the surrendering of speech to the sound of the bomb, the announcement that follows on the car radio is ironic. While both the car and the driver are destroyed and therefore silenced, the slogan, untouched by the surrounding violence, cheerfully promises protection and coverage. The slogan is not only bewildering, ineffectual and hollow but vulgar as well, as its lack of insight is cold and callous amidst the enormity and violence of the event. Hence, the slogan sharpens the irony and thereby deepens the pathos. It is perhaps an overwhelming expression of the poet's anger and despair at the horrors of the incident, and her rising disillusionment in a solution to a wounded nation.

# **GUIDELINES FOR LANGUAGE COMPETENCY**

## 5.1 Writing

### A Good Piece of Writing

Writing has at least two dimensions: at one level, writing is simply a system of storing knowledge and information for future reference and retrieval while at another level; writing appears to be a thinking process or a tool for thinking. Written expression deals with a number of underlying components. These structures of written language are often interconnected. The diagram given below shows a collection of these components that a writer must master to produce a good piece of writing.



### **Producing a piece of writing (Raimes 1983, p. 6)**

The above diagram could give some useful insights to students when they are writing different types of texts: essays, reports, reviews and so on. To communicate ideas effectively and fluently, the components shown in the diagram should be taken into account. There are nine salient components such as content, writer's process, audience, purpose, word choice, organization, mechanics, grammar and syntax. Although there are several components involved in writing, there is no specific order to follow these components but they are closely interconnected with each other. The writer should prioritize the order of the components depending on the purpose of writing. The content of the intended writing should be relevant to the topic, and clarity and originality of the writing should be ensured throughout the writing. In the case of writer's process, the writer should be guided through the process such as; getting ideas, getting started, writing drafts and revising. To become an excellent writer the process is very essential. He/she also needs to pay attention to the type of audience who are going to read his/her piece of writing. Suppose the writer writes a cartoon for children, he/she needs to decide on how he/she is going to transfer his/her ideas to the children. The writer should give a fairly justifiable reason for his/her write up. Herein, he/she needs to tell why he/she is selecting a particular topic and why he/she is producing a piece of writing.

When producing a good piece of writing, the students need to think of the range of vocabulary and the use of idioms. Also, tone required for a particular piece of writing depends on the topic and the type of audience. Organizing a particular write up is another important step in producing a good piece of writing and it involves a number of paragraphs required for expressing the ideas, cohesion and unity of the particular writing. Students are supposed to have a good knowledge about the use of mechanics when they are writing a review or an essay. These may consist of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and so on. As we know, the grammar plays a pivotal role in making a piece of writing readable and comprehensible without any ambiguity. So, the students should be able to make use of the correct grammatical elements like rules for verbs, subject verb agreement, voice, tense and so on. Those who want to produce a particular piece of writing should focus on the type of sentences they are going to use to express their ideas, and they also need to plan the stylistic choices and sentence boundaries. Students at the A/L should be aware

of the underlying components shown in the diagram in order to express their thoughts meaningfully, effectively and in the most efficient way possible.

Writing is a thought process in itself as it is a medium of communicating our feelings to ourselves and to others. It is a form where inner ideas are built up. We write to discover what is there in our mind and it is not just directly putting down ready-made thoughts on paper but it is developing a stream of thoughts on paper or screen. The majority of writers do not wind up with the exact amount of thoughts originally conceived. So, writing is the act of visualizing thoughts, developing them, modifying them and altering them until one is eventually pleased with the end result. Writing instructions in books following the process approach are arranged according to the sequences and stages of writing: preliminary ideas, prewriting activities, the outline, getting started, the first paragraph, the first draft, revising, editing, proofreading, further draft etc.

Typical writing tasks involve the following stages:

Discussion

Brainstorming

Self-evaluation

Planning

Peer evaluation

Writing the first draft

Self-evaluation

Peer evaluation

Revision/rewriting

Writing the second draft

Teacher evaluation and marking

### ***Pre-writing or planning:***

The reason for writing and knowing the audience for a piece of writing are very fundamental at the planning stage as reason and target inform one's choice of language. According to Hedge, "to select what to say and how to present it in the most appropriate style-formal, friendly, serious, or tentative" ( Hedge 19988, p. 22 cited in Karunakaran and Zohur 2013,p.106). The quantity of pre-writing or planning varies in accordance with the task at hand e.g. an email to a very close friend is very unplanned whereas an academic paper is highly planned. In the prewriting, we first provide the topic for students to write and then we ask them to brainstorm the main points and supporting points. Then, they prioritize the points to organize the facts logically. For example, the topic "Facebook should be banned in Sri Lanka"

### ***Writing and re-writing/revising***

To become an excellent writer, he/she need to focus on this stage. A professional writer writes down the ideas first without focusing too much on spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The key focus at this level is on the content or the theme of the proposed piece of writing. In the meantime, planning a good write up is the intervening stage.Revisingtakes place at the level of vocabulary, rearranging sentences and patterns, clarifying thoughts and links between them, omitting repeated ideas, filling gaps between ideas articulated and so on. Writing deals with *what* to say whereas re-writing or redrafting deals with *how* to say it efficiently. In the sense, the redrafting means that writer is expected to present his/her ideas without mistakes and ambiguities. For example, in the above topic, students need to write the first draft focusing on the content and then the teacher will be a guide. The teacher needs to give a feedback on content and students should produce the second draft considering the teacher's feedback

### ***Editing***

Editing is a last step in the process of final readjustment of the text and correction of the linguistic mistakes in the text to make sure of greatest convenience to the reader. Poor writers edit their writing from the very start of the composition and they only focus on grammar, punctuation, spelling- the lower order accuracy at the cost of the general organizational quality. They fail to understand the fact that leaving their writing for later re-thinking and reorganizing is necessary to produce quality writing. In the above topic of writing, the students should again get

the teacher to correct their grammar mistakes, punctuation errors, spelling mistakes and organization of the writing. Afterwards, students should produce the draft.

Writing is by and large considered a complex activity since it involves a great deal of thinking, planning, drafting and revising before producing a final text. This obvious complexity of writing makes us investigate its exclusive nature among the other language skills. The teachers should be aware of the writing process since they are supposed to guide the students in the right way so that students could produce different varieties of writing.

## References

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## 5.2 Essays

Essay writing is an important skill for students who offer English as a main subject in A-L. Choosing the correct topic in the exam paper is usually a critical decision for the students. They need to analyse the content of the topics quickly to choose the right one.

There are many types of essays; essentially there are four major types of essays,

### 1. Narrative Essays

In a narrative essay, the writer tells a story about a real-life experience that happened in the past. Also, the narrative essay challenges the students to think and write about themselves. When writing a narrative essay, writers should try to get the attention of the readers by making the story clear and logically organised. Narrative essays are usually written in the first person. “I” sentences give readers a feeling of being part of the story and engages the reader with a clear visual imagery. Also the narrative essay enables the reader to make personal conclusions while reading the write up.

## **2. Descriptive Essays: Creating a visual imagery**

A descriptive essay paints a picture with words. A writer might describe a person, place, object, or even the memory of special significance. However, this type of essay also gives a clear message on a social aspect to the readers. The descriptive essay strives to communicate a deeper meaning through the description. The best descriptive essays appeal to the reader's emotions, with a result that is highly evocative.

## **3. Factual essays**

This is an informative writing that presents a balanced analysis and makes the topic clear to the readers with examples. Here the writer explains a topic by using facts, statistics, and examples. Factual essays encompass a wide range of essays such as the comparison and contrast essays, the cause and effect essays, and the "how to" or process essays. Mainly the factual essays are mostly based on facts and writers don't reveal their emotions or write in the first person here.

## **4. Persuasive Essays:**

It is similar to a factual essay in its presentation of facts but the goal of the persuasive essay is to convince the reader to accept the writer's point of view or recommendation with the main idea and supporting points. The writer must organise the facts and logic, as well as examples with expert's opinions. The writer should be able to present all sides of the argument on the chosen topic, but must be able to communicate clearly and with clear evidence and reasons.

Some Samples of essays and the comments of the examiners are given below.

### **The development of transport is important to all in the country.**

The following extract is taken from a student's answer on this topic and followed by the comments of the examiner.

It would be better to think about other different kinds of transport. In Brazil the Government has talked about transport on the rivers. In this country there are many rivers where it is possible to go to different places. In general they are flat rivers.

Another kind of transport is car that uses solar energy. Probably they don't have pollution problem and it is cheaper than other car.

In conclusion, the transport is a social problem in big cities but its solution depend on new technologies, other kind of energy and political aspects.

#### Examiner comment

##### Band 6

There are quite a lot of ideas and while some of these are supported better than others, there is an overall coherence to the answer. The introduction is perhaps slightly long and more time could have been devoted to answering the question. The answer is fairly easy to follow and there is good punctuation. Organisational devices are evident although some areas of the answer become unclear and would benefit from more accurate use of connectives. There are some errors in the structures but there is also evidence of the production of complex sentence forms. Grammatical errors interfere slightly with comprehension.

The use of nuclear energy ensures the health of the environment.

... Nuclear power provides cheap energy sources. Sometimes the present sources of energy like oil, gas etc. will be finished.

Arguments in favour of nuclear power: The nuclear energy produces by chemical materials. It is comparatively cheaper than other energy. To produce the power it only involve some expert people and energy plant. Where to produce other energy it needs large involvement like worker, machineries, etc. And also takes more time. The nuclear power plants are well protected and monitor.

That is why there is less possibility

The threat of nuclear weapons maintains world peace because the developed countries like: U.K., U.S.A., Canada, France etc. have nuclear weapons (warhead).

Each country do not 'give' threat to other country. Because they know if

One country distribute others, then  
other will create problems from them.  
So it is well balanced and world  
peace maintains peacefully.

Though there are sometimes creates  
problems by the nuclear technology  
but sometimes it also help the  
mankind in the field of medicine  
and engineering sectors. In the medical  
field we can say by nuclear ray  
sometimes we can treat a cancer  
patient. On the other hand in the  
field of Engineering by the  
nuclear power engineers can do  
lot of things like operate engine  
instead of electricity. In conclusion  
we can say though there are some  
problems in the nuclear power but it  
has some benefit for the mankind.

#### Examiner comment

##### Band 5

Although the script contains some good arguments, these are presented using poor structures and the answer is not very coherent. The candidate has a clear point of view but not all the supporting arguments are linked together well and sometimes ideas are left unfinished. There is quite a lot of relevant vocabulary but this is not used skillfully and sentences often have words missing or lapse into different styles. The answer is spoilt by grammatical errors and poor expression.

## Reference

[www.ximaconsulting.com/downloads/IELTSWritingSamplesA.pdf](http://www.ximaconsulting.com/downloads/IELTSWritingSamplesA.pdf) (Retrieved)

### MODEL ANSWER

This model has been prepared by an examiner as an example of a very good answer. However, please note that this is just one example out of many possible approaches.

Traditionally, children have begun studying foreign languages at secondary school, but introducing them earlier is recommended by some educationalists. This policy has been adopted by some educational authorities or individual schools, with both positive and negative outcomes.

The obvious argument in its favour is that young children pick up languages much more easily than teenagers. Their brains are still programmed to acquire their mother tongue, which facilitates learning another language, and unlike adolescents, they are not inhibited by self-consciousness.

The greater flexibility of the primary timetable allows for more frequent, shorter sessions and for a play-centred approach, thus maintaining learners' enthusiasm and progress. Their command of the language in later life will benefit from this early exposure, while learning other languages subsequently will be easier for them. They may also gain a better understanding of other cultures.

There are, however, some disadvantages. Primary school teachers are generalists, and may not have the necessary language skills themselves. If specialists have to be brought in to deliver these sessions, the flexibility referred to above is diminished. If primary language teaching is not standardised, secondary schools could be faced with a great variety of levels in different languages within their intake, resulting in a classroom experience which undoes the earlier gains. There is no advantage if enthusiastic primary pupils become demotivated as soon as they change schools. However, these issues can be addressed strategically within the policy adopted.

Anything which encourages language learning benefits society culturally and economically, and early exposure to language learning contributes to this. Young children's innate abilities should be harnessed to make these benefits more achievable.

### 5.3 Précis

#### Writing a Précis

A précis is a shortened form of a written text (a written summary). It expresses the main ideas/ themes and all the important points in brief in a nutshell, a précis brings out the gist of the passage in a limited number of words which does not exceed one-third of the length of the original text. Everything that has been said in a lengthy description is said in a few words but every idea, and every fact is brought within it. Nothing important or relevant is left out.

#### Guidelines to be followed in précis writing.

1. Read the passage several times to get an understanding of the text.

Pay attention to understand what the passage deals with and also try to find out the central idea of the passage.

2. Note the length of the original text (no. of words).
3. Underline the essential points.
4. Create a suitable topic / title.
5. Write a sample draft of the précis and see whether all the important points are included.

Then start writing the précis.

6. Include all the essential points in logical order. Use words of transitions like therefore, because etc....
7. If the original text is divided into several small passages (paragraphs), the précis must present all the important points given in the paragraphs.
8. Avoid using original sentences from the text.
9. Exclude examples, illustrations, proverbs, repetitions and quotations.
10. Finally, it should be in your own words and create a cohesive paragraph.

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**Precis writing-**

**Samples with guidelines.**

Anger is an emotional state that is accompanied by physiological and biological changes: when you get angry your heart rate and blood pressure go up as do the energy hormones adrenaline and non adrenaline.

Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person or event or your anger could be caused by worrying or brooding about your personal problem. Memories of traumatic or enraging events can also trigger angry feelings.

Anger is a natural adaptive response to threats; it inspires powerful feelings and behaviour which allow us to fight and to defend ourselves when we are attacked. A certain amount of anger therefore is necessary to our survival.

On the other hand we can't physically lash out at every person or object that irritates or annoys us; laws, social norms and common sense place limits on how far anger can take us.

People use a variety of both conscious and unconscious processes to deal with their angry feelings. The three main approaches are expressing, suppressing and calming. Expressing your angry feelings in an assertive, non aggressive manner is the healthiest way to let out anger. Being assertive does not mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.

Anger can be suppressed and then converted or redirected. This happens when you hold in your anger stop thinking about it and focus on something positive. The aim is to inhibit or suppress your anger and convert it into more constructive behaviour. The danger in this type of response is that if it isn't allowed outward expression; your anger can turn inward - on yourself. And this can easily cause hypertension, high blood pressure or depression.

Finally you can calm down inside, This means not just controlling your outward behaviour but also controlling your internal responses, taking steps to lower your heart rate calm yourself down and let the feeling subside.

Some people are more hot headed than others are there are also those who do not show their anger in loud and aggressive ways but are always irritable and grumpy.

What makes people like this? A number of things. One cause may be genetic. There is evidence that some children are born irritable touchy and easily angered and that these signs are present from very early age.

Another may be socio - cultural. Anger is often regarded as negative; we are taught it is all right to express anxiety depression or other emotions but not to express anger. As a result, we don't learn how to handle it or channel it constructively.

people who are easily angered  
come from families that are disruptive, chaotic and not skilled at emotional communication.

### **Sample precis based on the given text**

Anger refers to an emotional state accompanied by physiological and biological changes, wherein blood pressure increases and adrenaline and non-adrenaline become active. It is caused by internal and external events along with memories of past events. It is a natural adaptive response to threats, and is therefore necessary for survival. Social norms and common sense check our expression of anger. There are three main approaches to anger – expressing, suppressing and calming. Expression in an unaggressive manner is healthy. Suppression and conversion into constructive activities is also healthy. Controlling your internal responses until the feeling subsides is also plausible. Some people are more hot-headed than others. Some don't show any anger but are always irritable. This may be because of genetic or socio-cultural factors. Family plays an important role in anger-management. People who cannot manage anger properly are known to have come from disruptive and chaotic family environments.

### **Precis Writing- Text 2**

Read the following text carefully.

Make a list of the most important points in the article.

English education and English language have brought immense impacts to India, even being aware of their glaring drawbacks. The notions of democracy and self-government are the result of English education. Those who fought and died for mother India's freedom were nursed in the cradle of English thought and culture. The West made development happen in the East. The history of Europe has fired the hearts of our leaders. Our struggle for freedom has been inspired by the struggles for freedom in England, America and France. If our leaders were ignorant of English and if they had not studied this language, how could they have been inspired by these heroic struggles for freedom in other lands? English, therefore, did us great good in the past and if properly studied will do immense good in the future.

English is spoken throughout the world. For international contact our commerce and trade, for the development of our practical ideas, for the scientific studies, English-is indispensable "English is very rich in literature," our own literature has been made richer by this foreign language.

It will really be a fatal day if we altogether forget Shakespeare, Milton, Keats and Shaw.

The main points given in the text are the following:

1. There are various defects of English education but English education has made a great impact on India.
2. The concept of democracy and self-government are its gifts.
3. Indian leaders were inspired by the western thought, culture, and freedom struggles due to English education.
4. They fought for the freedom of their motherland.
5. English is spoken all over the world and used in different contexts.

### **Precis Summary**

Notwithstanding its various defects English education has created great benefits to India. The ideas of democracy and self-government are its gifts. Under English education the Indian leaders were inspired by the Western thought, culture and freedom struggles. They fought for and won freedom of their motherland. Being spoken throughout the world, English is necessary for international contacts, trade, commerce and science. English is rich in literature; its inspiration cannot be neglected.

## 5.4 Unseen Texts

### Prose

Studying unseen text is a fundamental skill of students who do Literature and it must be developed in order to gain literacy competence. In order to be successful in handling unseen texts, learners need to change their focus from a memory-driven text to one involving the creative application of skills and knowledge.

It is useful to pay attention to the following areas when handling unseen prose.

- (1) Reading
- (2) Reflecting
- (3) Responding

Each of these areas requires application of specific skills which finally help to produce a successful essay.

In the area of 'Reading', it is important to understand the personal reading speed, focus firmly upon the text and interpret the characteristics of sub-genre, surface meaning, tone of voice, characterization etc. So in this section reader understands what is in the text.

In the area of 'Reflecting', it is important to learn how the writer designed the progression of ideas, images, phrases and specific words to make the text effective.

The final stage of 'Responding', is important as in this stage, one has to focus upon expressing the ideas analytically, having clarified the thinking and designed the shape of the response towards the text.

#### **Guidelines to follow**

1. Read the text well.
2. Read the questions given.
3. You must always use your own words to answer the questions.

4. By studying the unseen text, the student should be able to find the following points.

- I. Setting
- II. Subject/s
- III. Speaker
- IV. Tone
- V. Mood
- VI. Structure
- VII. Language
- VIII. Imagery

### **Subject/s**

What the text is about in the most obvious sense and what you understand to be the theme/s, idea/s, and message/s.

Find the writer's aim or the purpose.

### **Setting**

Identify the place and time. This should not be the specific century or the town, and it can be given us early evening in a tropical country

### **Speaker**

Who speaks?

### **Tone**

How are the words said?

Does the tone change?

Is it angry, sarcastic, admiring....

### **Mood**

What mood or atmosphere is created for the reader? Sad, happy, nostalgic...

### **Structure**

How is the extract structured?

Are there any divisions which enhance the meaning? (Dialogues, monologues...).

### **Language**

Basic style of writing. Ex. Plain, sophisticated, conversational etc.

Any specific words which strike you.

### **Imagery**

Which senses do the words appeal to?

### **Exam Techniques**

Read the text well and go through the questions given. Re-read the text, highlighting significant points. Then answer.

<https://dj-english.wikispaces.com>. Retrieved in 2017

*resource.download.wjec.co.uk.s3.amazonaws.com/vtc/2014.../prose/Unseen\_Prose.pdf...*

*Retrieved on 26.06.2017.*

### **Unseen Prose-sample with guidelines.**

By his own wish the funeral had been as simple and private as possible. One or two distant relations, whom Constance scarcely knew and who would probably not visit her again until she too was dead, came—and went. And the affair was over. The simple celerity of the funeral would have satisfied even Samuel, whose tremendous self-esteem hid itself so effectually behind such externals that nobody had ever fully perceived it. Not even Constance quite knew Samuel's secret opinion of Samuel. Constance was aware that he had a ridiculous side, that his greatest

lack had been a lack of spectacular dignity. Even in the coffin, where nevertheless most people are finally effective, he had not been imposing—with his finicky little grey beard persistently sticking up.

The vision of him in his coffin—there in the churchyard, just at the end of King Street!—with the lid screwed down on that unimportant beard, recurred frequently in the mind of the widow, as something untrue and misleading. She had to say to herself: ‘Yes, he is really there! And that is why I have this particular feeling in my heart.’ She saw him as an object pathetic and wistful, not majestic. And yet she genuinely thought that there could not exist another husband quite so honest, quite so just, quite so reliable, and quite so good, as Samuel had been. What a conscience he had! How he would try, and try, to be fair with her! Twenty years she could remember, of ceaseless, constant endeavor on his part to behave rightly to her! She could recall many an occasion when he had obviously checked himself, striving against his tendency to cold abruptness and to sullenness, in order to give her the respect due to a wife. What loyalty was his! How she could depend on him! How much better he was than herself (she thought with modesty)!

His death was an amputation for her. But she faced it with calmness. She was not bowed with sorrow. She did not nurse the idea that her life was at an end; on the contrary, she obstinately put it away from her, dwelling on Cyril. She did not indulge in the enervating voluptuousness of grief. She had begun in the first hours of bereavement by picturing herself as one marked out for the blows of fate. She had lost her father and her mother, and now her husband. Her career seemed to be punctuated by interments. But after a while her gentle commonsense came to insist that most human beings lose their parents, and that every marriage must end in either a widower or a widow, and that all careers are punctuated by interments. Had she not had nearly twenty-one years of happy married life? (Twenty-one years—rolled up! The sudden thought of their naive ignorance of life, hers and his, when they were first married, brought tears into her eyes.

How wise and experienced she was now!) And had she not Cyril? Compared to many women, she was indeed very fortunate.

**a) Subject/s**

1. What is this text about?
2. What are the themes/main ideas/messages given?
3. Find the purpose of the writer.

**b) Setting**

1. Where does this incident take place?
2. Identify the characters involved in the situation?
3. Does the setting seem contemporary? Justify.
4. What customs/practices in the text contribute to the setting?

**c) Speaker**

1. Who do you think the speaker is?
2. Identify the speaker's tone. / Does the tone change with the situation? (**tone**)
3. What mood or atmosphere is created in the context? (**mood**)

**d) Structure (For the reference of the teacher)**

1. How is the extract/text structured?
2. Are there any divisions/dialogues/any special features of language structure?

**e) Language (For the reference to the teacher)**

1. Explain the style of writing. (Eg. Plain, sophisticated, conversational, formal, archaic)
2. The grammar used
3. Vocabulary used
4. What are the specific words used to enhance the meaning?

## **F) Inference**

1. What is the meaning of the given line?
2. What does this line/word refer to?

\* In order to draw the conclusions, inference is very important.

## **g) Personal response.**

1. What is your personal response towards the characters/situations?

## **FIVE STEPS TO ANALYSE AN UNSEEN POEM**

Here are five steps that you can use to deconstruct an unseen poem and finally to help you to answer the questions in the language paper.

### **STEP ONE:** What the poem is **about**...

- What is the subject of the poem?
- Who is speaking?
- Who is the narrator speaking to?
- Where does it happen?

### **STEP TWO:** The **themes** and **message**.

- What is the purpose of the writer for writing this poem?
- Is it relevant to the society that the readers live in?
- Does it have any emotional response in the reader? What is it?
- Analyse the main message of the poem with evidence.

### **STEP THREE:** Attitudes and the feelings.

- Analyse the different emotions and feelings of the narrator or poet.

- What is the mood or atmosphere of the poem (e.g. sad, angry, etc.)?
- Identify the different poetic techniques that show these attitudes and feelings.

**STEP FOUR:** Deep Analysis of the Poetic Techniques

- List the poetic techniques that you come across in this poem (e.g. metaphors, similes, caesura, enjambment, alliteration, juxtaposition, personification, etc.).
- How has the poet shown these feelings through the poetic techniques that you listed?

**STEP FIVE:** Let's explore your personal response!!!

- How do you feel about the poem?
- Have you ever experienced this in your life?

These steps with unseen poems can be practiced over and over again until the students get thorough practice in analyzing the new poems. The poems in the syllabus can be approached first through these steps and that will give ample practice to analyse the poem as well as to get a clear idea on their own about the poems in their syllabus.

**Here is a poem for you to look at and have a go at the 5 step process with.**

We walk to the ward from the badly parked car  
with your grandma taking four short steps to our two.

We have brought her here to die and we know it.

You check her towel. soap and family trinkets,  
pare her nails, parcel her in the rough blankets  
and she sinks down into her incontinence.

It is time John. In their pasty bloodless smiles,  
in their slack breasts, their stunned brains and their baldness  
and in us John: we are almost these monsters.

You're shattered. You give me the keys and I drive  
through the twilight zone, past the famous station  
to your house, to numb ourselves with alcohol.  
Inside, we feel the terror of the dusk begin.  
Outside we watch the evening, failing again,  
and we let it happen. We can say nothing.  
Sometimes the sun spangles and we feel alive.  
One thing we have to get, John, out of this life.

Reference Material: -

[https://wjec.co.uk.s3.amazonaws.com/vtc/.../poetry/Unseen\\_Poetry.pdf](https://wjec.co.uk.s3.amazonaws.com/vtc/.../poetry/Unseen_Poetry.pdf) Retrieved on 25.06.2017

**(Footnotes)**











