

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

**Grade 13**

**Teacher's Instructional Manual**

**Department of English**  
**Faculty of Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**National Institute of Education**

2010

# Foreword

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# Preface

## **Introduction - School Based Assessment**

Learning Teaching and Evaluation are the three major components of the process of Education. It is a fact that teachers should know that evaluation is used to assess the progress of the learning – teaching process. Moreover, teachers should know that these components influence mutually and develop each other. According to Formative Assessment (Continuous Assessment) fundamentals, assessment should take place during the process of teaching. Formative Assessment can be done at the beginning, in the middle, at the end and at any instance of the learning teaching process.

Teachers who expect to assess the progress of learning of the students should use an organized plan. School Based Assessment (SBA) process is not a mere examination method or a testing method. This programme is known as an intervention to develop learning of students and teaching of teachers. Furthermore, this process can be used to maximize the students' capacities by identifying their strengths and weaknesses closely.

When implementing SBA programmes, students are directed to exploratory processes through Learning Teaching activities and it is expected that teachers should be with the students facilitating, directing and observing the task they are engaged in.

At this juncture, students should be assessed continuously and the teacher should confirm whether the skills of the students get developed up to expected levels by assessing continuously. The learning-teaching process should not only provide proper experiences to the students but also check whether the students have acquired them properly. For this to happen, proper guidance should be given.

Teachers who are engaged in evaluation (assessment) would be able to supply guidance in two ways. They are commonly known as feedback and feed-forward. Teacher's role should be providing feedback to avoid learning difficulties when the students' weaknesses and inabilities are revealed and provide feed-forward when the abilities and the strengths are identified, to develop such strong skills of the students.

For the success in the teaching process, students need to identify which objectives of the course of study could be achieved and to what extent. Teachers are expected to judge the competency levels students have reached through evaluation and they should communicate information about student progress to parents and other relevant parties. The best method that can be used to assess is the SBA that provides the opportunity to assess students continuously.

Teachers who have got the above objectives in mind will use effective learning, teaching, and evaluation methods to make the teaching process and learning process effective. Following are the types of evaluation tools students and teachers can use. These types were introduced to teachers by the Department of Examination and National Institute of Education with the new reforms. Therefore, we expect that the teachers in the system would be well aware of them.

**Types of assessment tools:**

- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Assignments               | 2. Projects              |
| 3. Survey                    | 4. Exploration           |
| 5. Observation               | 6. Exhibitions           |
| 7. Field trips               | 8. Short written reports |
| 9. Structured essays         | 10. Open book test       |
| 11. Creative activities      | 12. Listening Tests      |
| 13. Practical work           | 14. Speech               |
| 15. Self-creation            | 16. Group work           |
| 17. Concept maps             | 18. Double entry journal |
| 19. Wall papers              | 20. Quizzes              |
| 21. Question and answer book | 22. Debates              |
| 23. Panel discussions        | 24. Seminars             |
| 25. Impromptus speeches      | 26. Role-plays           |

Teachers are not expected to use the above-mentioned activities for all the units and for all the subjects. Teachers should be able to pick and choose the suitable type for the relevant units and for the relevant subjects to assess the progress of the students appropriately. The types of assessment tools are mentioned in the Teacher’s Instructional Manual.

If the teachers try to avoid administering the relevant assessment tools in their classes, there will be lapses in exhibiting the growth of academic capacities, affective factors and psycho-motor skills in the students

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# PART I

# 01. DRAMA

## 1.1. Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett

### 1.1.1. About the Author

- Samuel Beckett was born on April 13, 1906, near Dublin, Ireland. He was the youngest of two sons of a well-to-do bourgeois family
- In 1928, Samuel Beckett moved to Paris, and the city quickly won his heart. Shortly after he arrived, a mutual friend introduced him to James Joyce, and Beckett quickly became an apostle of the older writer. After writing a study of Proust, however, Beckett came to the conclusion that habit and routine were the “cancer of time”, so he gave up his teaching post at Trinity College and set out on a nomadic journey across Europe.
- Beckett finally settled down in Paris in 1937. During World War II, Beckett stayed in Paris – even after it had become occupied by the Germans.
- He joined the underground movement and fought for the resistance until 1942 when several members of his group were arrested and he was forced to flee with his French-born wife to the unoccupied zone.
- In 1945, after it had been liberated from the Germans, he returned to Paris and began his most prolific period as a writer. In the five years that followed, he wrote Eleutheria, Waiting for Godot, Endgame, the novels Malloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable, and Mercier et Camier, two books of short stories, and a book of criticism.
- Beckett was the first of the Absurdist to win international fame. His works have been translated into over twenty languages. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- He continued to write until his death in 1989, but the task grew more and more difficult with each work until, in the end, he said that each word seemed to him “an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.”

### 1.1.2. Historical Context

- The writing of Samuel Beckett and his contemporaries conveys a keen sense of disillusionment and seems to highlight a collapse of all previously held beliefs. These playwrights no longer believed in the possibility of neat resolutions, acceptable solutions and the tidy settlement of conflict. This pessimism and disenchantment are largely the result of the historical events of the time.
  - The waning of religious faith that had started with the Enlightenment and led Nietzsche to speak of the 'death of God' by the eighteen – eighties:
  - The breakdown of social progress in the wake of the First World War:
  - The disillusionment regarding Marxian radical social revolution after Stalin had turned the Soviet Union into a totalitarian tyranny:
  - The relapse into barbarism, mass murder, and genocide in the course of Hitler's brief rule during the second World War:
  - The spread of spiritual emptiness in the outwardly prosperous and affluent societies of Western Europe and the United States, in the aftermath of World War II.
1. For many intelligent and sensitive human beings the world of the mid twentieth century had lost its meaning and had simply ceased to make sense. Suddenly man saw himself faced with a universe that was both frightening and illogical – in a word, absurd.
  - 2 This same sense of disillusionment and uncertainty, coupled with a lack of faith in previously unshakable ideas, is also reflected in other genres of literature written in the same period. e.g. the poetry of T.S, Eliot, Ezra Pound, e.e. Cummings and many novels of the period such as Nausee (Nausea)

### 1.1.3. The Theatre of the Absurd

- A term applied to the works of a group of dramatists active in the 1950's, namely Arthur Adamov, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter.
- When the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Adamov first appeared on the stage they puzzled and outraged most critics as well audiences, for willfully flouting all the standards by which drama had been previously judged.
- At the time a play was expected to present characters that are well observed and convincingly motivated, whereas these plays of the Theatre of the Absurd often contain hardly any recognizable human beings and present completely unmotivated actions.
- A play was expected to entertain by the use of witty and logically built-up dialogue: in some of these plays dialogue seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble.
- A play was expected to have a beginning, a middle, and a neatly tied-up ending : these plays often start at an arbitrary point and seem to end just as arbitrarily.
- By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of drama, these plays are not only abominably bad; they do not even deserve the name drama.
- What then is the convention of drama that has now acquired the label of the theatre of the Absurd?

The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are primarily intended to convey a poetic image or a complex pattern of poetic images. They are above all a poetical form. While the traditional play focuses on telling a story in a linear or chronological fashion, following narrative or discursive mode of communication, these plays are concerned with conveying a central idea (as all poetry usually does), and thus often remain static.

- The Theater of the Absurd began and flourished in Paris as a post- war phenomenon, with most of its exponents being exiles from their own countries. (Beckett is an Anglo-Irishman, Ionesco is half-French, half-Romanian etc.)Perhaps it is this experience of being an outcast or an exile that informed their own understanding of a world that is

meaningless, of pursuits that are senseless and language that is incomprehensible, that is so vividly expressed in these plays themselves.

- Most plays belonging to the School of Absurd Theater depict a stark and disillusioned picture of the world. Though often presented in the form of extravagant fantasies, they are nonetheless realistic in the sense that they never depart from the fear, loneliness and despair that affect the human mind in an alien and hostile universe.

#### **1.1.4. Theatre Conventions** (see also – underlined sections in 3. Theatre of the Absurd)

The most salient feature of the Theatre of the Absurd is the complete flouting of all theatre conventions seen up to that time. While these plays have limited conventions in common, they are united in their parodying and dismissal of realism and the concept of “ a well-made play “, Here we see no realistic sets, no meaningful characters, no definable setting, no comprehensible use of language. Time, place and identity are all fluid and even basic causality breaks down. Given below are some theatre conventions commonly seen in Absurd Drama.

1. Broad comedy mixed with horrific or tragic images
2. Repetitive or meaningless actions of characters
3. Cyclical or absurdly expansive plots
4. Nonsensical dialogue
5. Minimalist sets(often boxes or stools)
6. Dream- like or nightmare-like mood
7. While many of the plays described by this title seem to be quite random and meaningless on the surface, an underlying structure and meaning is usually found in the midst of the chaos.

8. Characters- many characters are like automatons, stuck in meaningless routines the more complex characters are in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible. The characters are often featured in interdependent pairs, roughly equal or with a grudging interdependence (e.g. Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*) However, the dynamics between the pair shift continually throughout the play.
9. Language – One of the most important aspects of Absurd Drama is its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language, it seems to say, has become nothing but a vehicle for conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges and so Absurd Drama attempts to critique language by presenting it merely as a means to fill the emptiness that surrounds the human condition. The language used is often banal, clichéd and meaningless, a series of repetitive ideas and phrases that serve to underline the unreliability and inefficacy of language as tool of meaningful communication.

### 1.1.5. Characters

#### Vladimir and Estragon ( Didi and Gogo)

- Mutually dependant – epitomize the inseparable, complementary elements of the human personality.
- Estragon is more associated with the body ( is more perplexed with physical concerns – his boots, his wounded feet, death, physical pain etc.)
- Vladimir has more intellectual preoccupations ( NB- the stage directions given for him include “he reflects... musingly... deep in thought... examines his hat” which underline his more intellectual disposition)
- Vladimir is philosophical: eg. Vladimir- “What are we doing here, that is the question... Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today?... But in

all that what truth will there be?" Such thinking is of little concern to the more emotional Estragon.

- Vladimir is ever an optimist – That one of the two thieves crucified with Christ was saved seems to him ‘a reasonable percentage’. Unlike Estragon who finds that life just gets ‘worse’, Vladimir decides, ‘With me it’s just the opposite...I get used to the muck as I go along.’
- Didi usually speaks as mind, and Gogo speaks as body. Gogo eats, sleeps, and faces beating while offstage, whereas Didi ponders spiritual salvation. Didi is the more eloquent of the two, with Gogo sitting, learning, limping, falling, i.e., seeking nearness to the ground. Gogo relies on pantomime, while Didi leans toward rhetoric. Gogo wants Lucky to dance; Didi wants him to think.

### **Pozzo and Lucky**

- Complementary characters like Vladimir and Estragon.
- Pozzo is an extrovert, Lucky an introvert
- Pozzo is a domineering, bullying master, Lucky is a treacherous, but abjectly obedient slave – they both benefit from this slave- master relationship, because it gives them identity and purpose.
- An exploitative relationship
- They are the only ones in the play who change – Pozzo changes from his “wonderful sight” to complete blindness; Lucky, - who has already undergone a drastic change when we first see him from a teacher of “beautiful things” to an incoherent babbling, changes further from a speaking animal to a dumb automaton who cannot even groan.
- Their perpetual wanderings signify Time’s changelessness and cyclical stasis.

ii. Act 1 begins with Estragon trying to pull off his boots.

iii. Act 1 – Lucky’s lengthy monologue

iv. Act I closes –

Estragon : Well, shall we go?

Vladimir : Yes, let’s go.

{They do not move}

#### 1.1.6. Critic’s Comments

- “The play does not tell a story; it examines a static situation. Nearly one quarter of the play’s text is presented in form of questions. The play starts in *medias res*- in the midst of circular and pointless repetition” **Bret O. states** in “The Language of Myth”
- Repeated phrases, lines and words and the fact that the second act repeats the first act are used to “signify the senseless repetition and relentless flow of time inherent to human existence” ( Esslin, Becket and the Theater of the Absurd”)
- “Their talk is not so much anti-intellectual as it is counter – intellectual; in the course of the play they mock or demolish all of our myths of meaning, using language against itself to do so,

#### 1.1.7. Themes

- The meaninglessness of life (a questioning of life as it was)- “ Nothing to be done “” the constant waiting for Godot – a presence that never comes, the need for a saviour.
- Human suffering

- The static quality of Time – Time is meaningless as it does not move on in a linear way, serving to underline the utter helplessness and despair of those stuck in the present. As Time remains static, the hope for change, improvement in the characters disappears.
- Questions of existence /Existentialism – do I exist?

### 1.1.8. Suggested Activities

**Activity 1** – A useful activity to illustrate the “absurd “nature of the play

Column 1 lists events that take place in the play. Column 2 lists some of the things we might realistically expect in a second act. Complete column 3 by noting what is actually given in the drama. What does column 3 reveal about how the play progresses?

<b>Act 1</b>	<b>Act 2 – next day – realistic</b>	<b>Act 2 – as Presented</b>
Characters meet on a country road	They recognize the same place.	
They notice a tree.	They recognize the tree	
Tree has no leaves.	Tree has no leaves.	
They have boots and a hat	They recognize their boots and hat	
Pozzo and Lucky arrive	Pozzo and Lucky are recognizably same	
Boy arrives	Boy remembers yesterday’s meeting.	

**Activity 2** – (a useful activity in making students understand the symmetry in the cyclical structure of the play)

Ask students to identify how the following events / parts of dialogue recur or change between Act 1 and Act 2. (They can then add to the list)

e.g. Act 1

Estragon on stage: Vladimir enters  
 Vladimir: Get up till I embrace you

-as to prevent it from disguising their radical vulnerability . “(Gilman – Modern Critical Interpretations of Beckett)

- The play is, in fact, less than nothing – suggests REGRESSION: “But here less than nothing happens. It is as if we were watching a sort of regression beyond nothing. As always in Beckett, that little we are given to begin with, and which we thought so meager at the time, soon decays under our very eyes – disintegrates like Pozzo , who comes back bereft of sight dragged by a Lucky, bereft of speech the carrot, which as if by mockery has dwindled by the second act to a radish”(Esslin)

- **Activity 3**

Estragon’s boot..... Vladimir’s hat.

Discuss the function of these and other symbolic images that are repeated and emphasized in “Waiting for Godot.”

- **Activity 4** – Consider the effect of varying repetition, as in the example below.

**Act 1 :**

Valadimir : Your don’t know me?

Boy : No, sir.

Valadimir : It wasn’t you came yesterday?

Boy: No,sir

(silence)

**Act 2 :**

Vladimir: Do you not recognise me?

Boy: No, sir.

Vladimir: It wasn’t you came yesterday

Boy : No, sir.

(silence)

- Some useful questions to further explore the text

II. How significant is the setting of “waiting for Godot?”

III. Pozzo : I don’t seem to be able..... ( Long hesitation) ....to depart. Estragon: Such is life

IV. Explore how the play’s structure serves to emphasise the play’s themes.

- V. Vladimir is even more pathetic than Estragon because he wrestles persistently but with utter futility against meaningless. Discuss.
- VI. 'One act,' Beckett noted, 'would have been too little and three acts would have been too much, Why are two acts neither 'too little' nor 'too much'?'

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## **1.2. The House of Bernarda Alba by Federico Garcia Lorca**

### **1.2.1 About the Author**

Federico Garcia Lorca was a Spanish poet, dramatist and theatre director. He was born in the small village of Fuente Vaqueros, Granada in 1898. He attended the University of Granada where he acquired an excellent knowledge of literature. In 1919 he moved to the famous Residencia de Estudiantes, the intellectual centre of Madrid where he met many writers, scholars and critics who visited the place. In Madrid his involvement in literary and artistic life was very significant.

His first play produced in 1920, the Butterfly's Evil Spell, written in his teens, was a failure. This influenced Lorca's attitude to the theatre-going public so much so that he would claim Mariana Pineda (1927) as his first play. He was successful as a poet and his Gipsy Ballad Book (Romancero Gitano) published in 1928 made Garcia Lorca the poet of Andalusia and its gypsy sub-culture.

Between 1929-30 he was mostly in New York City and studied at Columbia University's School of General Studies. There, he wrote a collection of poems Poeta en Nueva York (posthumously published in 1940) He also wrote two plays-The Public (begun in 1930) and Once Five Years Pass (finished in 1931) He returned to Spain in 1930.

In 1931, Lorca was given an appointment as the director of a university student theatre company, Teatro Universitario la Barraca (The Shack) funded by The Ministry of Education. This theatre company was expected to travel to very remote rural areas in Spain to introduce audiences to radically modern interpretations of Classical Spanish theatre. Lorca's contribution to these performances was immense. In 1934, the funding for the theatre company was cut in half and its last performance was in April 1936. Just three days before the Civil War broke out in 1936, Lorca

left Madrid for Granada. After the war broke out, he was arrested by the Nationalist militia and was killed on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1936.

Lorca's first major play was Blood Wedding (1933) followed by Yerma (1934) and The House of Bernarda Alba (1936), making a trilogy. These were written while he was touring with the La Barraca. The House of Bernarda Alba was performed and published posthumously in 1945.

Lorca's work was banned by the regime headed by General Franco. The ban was rescinded in 1953, but it was only after General Franco's death in 1975 that Lorca's life and death could be openly discussed in Spain.

### **1.2.2. The Political Background**

Garcia Lorca returned to Spain in 1930. By then the dictatorship set up in 1923 under General Primo de Rivera had fallen. Spain's Second Republic was established in 1931, which marked the end of the monarchy identified with the Spanish state. For the next five years there was political turmoil in the country due to the hostilities between the new left wing coalition of the Republicans and the Conservatives including General Franco.

In 1933 elections a conservative government was elected and General Franco was eventually appointed as the Chief of Staff of the army.

When a Conservative government was elected in 1936, the left-wing groups grew strong, and were considered a great threat to the country. This led to the Spanish Civil War and General Franco was in the forefront. The rebellion divided the country into two enemy camps. After this bitter Civil War the Nationalists headed by General Franco announced their victory in 1939.

General Franco ruled Spain as a dictator from 1939 onwards. His government didn't allow the people much freedom of expression and was particularly opposed to Communism.

### 1.2.3. Genre

“**Poetic Drama** was a term applied to plays written in verse or in a heightened, ‘poetic’ form of prose, which in the 19th and 20th centuries constituted an attempt to restore the medium of poetry to the stage. In earlier times all plays throughout Europe were in verse, and tragedy continued to be so written long after prose had become the accepted medium for comedy. Shakespeare interpolated comic scenes in prose into his great poetic plays; and by the time of [Dryden](#), prose comedies existed side by side with tragedies in verse. As the theatre increasingly attracted a mass audience, prose (with a greater or lesser approximation to everyday speech) became the accepted mode of expression for all plays.” [The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre 1996]

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the tradition in drama was essentially realistic. Nevertheless, many dramatists attempted to revive **poetic drama** in their works. T.S.Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) stands out as a great poetic drama that deals with martyrdom of St Thomas à Becket at the Canterbury Cathedral. The poetic dramas of Lorca are placed among the great works of Spanish literature.

“From Lorca’s Theatre” by Richard L O’Connell and James Graham L. is the book length translation of Lorca’s dramas into the English language. It contains ‘Yerma’, one of the trilogy and four other plays.

Lorca powerfully blends poetic imagery with strong sexual passion in his dramas. His feeling for the suffering of the oppressed people is evident in his writing. The trilogy expresses the tragic life of Spanish women and *The House of [Bernarda](#) Alba* is interpreted as a tragedy of rural Spanish women who had been denied the freedom of choosing a husband. It also conveys the degree of repression exercised by [Bernarda](#) Alba. Lorca subtitled this play as “A drama of women in the villages of Spain” which suggests his sensitivity concerning women in a society dominated by males.

Lorca's plays were different from those of his predecessors in the blending of drama and poetry and also in the place he gave music. Of the three plays in the trilogy, *The House of Bernarda Alba* has almost no music or verse except Maria Josefa's lullaby which is in contrast to the prose of the other characters. Nonetheless, this play has a strong poetic quality with its use of tigers of speech including visual, metaphors similes and symbols which make it a coherent whole.

The characters in *The House of Bernarda Alba* are faced with a struggle between freedom and repression. Bernarda exercises her authority over her daughters, mother and servants denying them the freedom of speech, dress and even a breath of fresh air. There is also a portrayal of a conflict between the individual and the society. Bernarda is obsessed with what the neighbours would say regarding what happens inside her house. Individual desire is not fulfilled as a result of social barriers. Adela yearns to escape from Bernarda's house to be with Pepe el Romano, but it would be against social expectations. Even though the play suggests that she carries his child, her option is suicide. Bernarda's announcement at the close of the play about Adela's virginity highlights the repression of desire.

This play is often interpreted as a foreshadowing of the repression of free thinking that would be exercised by the Franco regime. This is suggested by Bernarda demanding silence at the end of the play.

Bernarda's attitude to the society she lives in is a strong suggestion of this play being a social criticism. She remarks "The poor are like animals. They seem to be made of other substances".

#### **1.2.4. Plot**

The action opens in "a very white inner room in Bernarda Alba's house." When the curtain opens, the stage is empty and bells are tolling for the funeral of Bernarda's second husband. According to tradition Bernarda imposes an eight year period of mourning on her household. She tyrannically rules over her five daughters, aged between 20 and 39, who are denied any relationship with men. Bernarda's authority over the servants is also very evident. Angustias, the sickly eldest daughter,

attracts a suitor from the village, Pepe el Romano because of her wealth inherited from her father, Bernarda's first husband. This opportunity for marriage which would liberate her from the constraints of her house increases the jealousy in her sisters. Adela, the youngest daughter, has a secret love affair with Pepe. Martirio, her sister aged 24, is also in love with Pepe. There is growing tension in the household. In an extremely tense moment Bernarda shoots Pepe to chase him away. Adela believing that he is killed, goes into her room and hangs herself. Pepe escapes and Bernarda remarks that being a woman, she lacked the skill of using a gun. They break open the door to find Adela dead. Bernarda cries out that the family's reputation is preserved as Adela has died a virgin. Her order to be silent reverberates at the end of the play.

#### **1.2.4. Themes**

There are several strands of interest that Lorca explores in *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

##### **a. Beauty and wealth**

Bernarda's youngest daughter Adela is the most beautiful of the five sisters. Pepe el Romano is to marry Angustias because she is rich. But he is in love with Adela. The sisters resent Adela because Pepe is her lover.

There is frequent reference to land as a source of wealth. Social status is decided by wealth. The suitability of men for Bernarda's daughters is judged on wealth alone.

##### **b. Tradition and destiny**

The characters attempt to control their own lives and thereby face the inevitable that ends in tragedy. Destiny is intermingled with the repetition of the life cycle. Events in the past seem to occur again. Bernarda declares eight years of mourning in her house. She refers to how it had been in her father's house and in her grandfather's house. Several symbols of bad luck can be seen. e.g. spilt salt, the pearl engagement ring. Good luck is not for anyone in the house. Adela attempts to act against fate, but fails. The other sisters succumb to fate.

Death is ever-present in the play. It begins with a death and ends with one. Adela wants to be with Pepe and when she thought he was dead she too chooses death.

### **c. Freedom in society**

All the sisters hope for freedom which is denied to them by Bernarda's iron rule. Bernarda keeps her mother too under lock and key. For Spanish women, men and freedom are mutually exclusive possibilities. Even the subservience to a husband would provide more freedom than the tyrannical authority of a woman. The wealth of Angustias would provide her an escape from tyranny. Bernarda's daughters speak of the men who work in the fields who are free and independent unlike themselves imprisoned in the house.

### **d. Honour**

The play shows how notions regarding status, money and gossip are closely related to honour. Bernarda attempts to maintain her social status by not letting her daughters marry beneath their social position. Mourning for her husband's death for eight years is for the sake of honour and tradition. It is tragic for her daughters. La Poncia is paid for bringing in the gossip in the town. Bernarda's sense of honour is dependent on the opinions of her neighbours. At the end of the play she is not able to control the neighbours finding out the truth.

### **e. Women**

As in the other two plays in the trilogy, *The House of Bernarda Alba* deals with the plight of Spanish women. The sub-title of this play is 'a Drama of Women in the Villages of Spain' and it stands apart from his other plays by having more frustrated women. No male characters appear on stage although the presence of men is felt everywhere. Women's feelings of isolation arise mostly due to men's actions and attitudes. Bernarda seems to be representative of the Francoist view that "a woman's place is home. She asserts this view by behaving as a "domineering old tyrant" who is more masculine than feminine ruling her family with an iron hand. The play does not suggest

that she enjoys her freedom because she always vents feelings of anger, resentment and hatred on others. She speaks good of no one. Sexual frustration of women is depicted by Pepe not appearing on stage. His presence in the background makes the mother resentful of the daughters and the sisters with each other. A woman has no control over taking decisions about her life and hence she resorts to desperate actions such as suicide or murder. Adela kills herself in sheer desperation.

### **1.2.5. Characters**

#### ***Bernarda***

She is the 60 year old mother of 5 daughters. The play starts just after the death of her second husband Antonio Maria Benavides. Her strong authority over the whole household is quite evident in the conversation between La Poncia and an unnamed maid. The 5 daughters are also always subjected to her tyranny. Her 80 year old mother is kept locked in a room too. Bernarda's sense of superiority over the neighbours is shown in many ways. She would not allow any of her daughters to be courted by men from the neighbourhood. "The men here are not of their class." She prevented Martirio's marriage to Enrique Humanas because "his father was a field hand". She declares a strict code of behaviour for the daughters during the 8 years of mourning.

Every precaution is taken to prevent the prying eyes of the neighbours from seeing what takes place inside her house. She is vicious and manipulative. La Poncia is paid for bringing in the gossip of the neighbourhood, and she uses this information as a weapon against Bernarda.

She often reiterates the place of women in the Spanish society. "A needle and thread for females...". Bernarda's callousness and the strong concern for her social position is clear in her statement about Adela's death at the end of the play. "The youngest daughter of Bernarda Alba has died a virgin"

## *Angustias*

She is the eldest daughter of Bernarda, 39 years, born of Bernarda's first marriage. She inherits wealth from her father, to be courted by Pepe el Romano. Angustias as well as her sisters are aware that he is after her money. She seems to be in poor health and not attractive. Magdalena says of her, "She looked like a scarecrow when she was 20, what can she look like now that she's 40?"

Deprived of any hopes of marriage, her half-sisters envy her. Angustias comments on her advantageous situation over the others, "Anyone who doesn't like it, can go to the devil." Bernarda beats her with her cane for 'peering at the men through the crack in the front door'. She also accuses Angustias of being 'soft and slippery' like her aunts. At the end of the play Angustias succumbs to her fate when Adela says, "I am his woman. Get that into your head." Angustias' outburst is a curse "Thief! You're a dishonour to our house".

## *Adela*

She is the most strong-willed daughter of Bernarda. Aged 20, she is the youngest and the most attractive. She considers the period of mourning catching her 'at the worst possible time' referring to her interest in Pepe el Romano. Her angry outbursts at her sisters are evidence of her character. "I can't be locked up. I don't want my body to dry up like yours. I don't want to waste away and grow old in these rooms. Tomorrow I'll put on my green dress and go walking down the street. I want to get out."

She has a clandestine love affair with Pepe el Romano, Angustias' suitor. She challenges Poncia who has found that out, "See if you can catch this wild rabbit with your hands". Her thirst for water is symbolic of her sexual passion. She yearns to be free to breathe the fresh air in the fields. At the climactic end of the play, she breaks her mother's cane into two, calling it a 'tyrant's rod'. She defiantly confronts both her mother and Angustias in trying to run away with Pepe.

## 1.2.6. Literary Techniques

Lorca intended to make this play more “objective” by not using verse as in the two other tragedies. Only the lullaby of Maria Josefa and the song of the harvesters are presented in verse form.

This play lacks the stylized element of the other two plays but does not follow total Realism.

Lorca wanted this play to be a “photographic record” capturing rural Spanish life in a naturalistic manner.

Although the language of the play does not sound like poetry it contains many poetic elements such as:

### **a. use of imagery mostly suggesting rural life.**

E.g. like a water pitcher being filled little by little

Dried up old lizard

As tight as a sheaf of wheat

See if you can catch this wild rabbit with your hands

### **b. use of repetition**

e.g. the maid imitates the bells of the church, Ding, ding, dong! Ding, ding, dong!

Must I go on living after you have gone? Must I go on living?

### **c. Use of symbols**

The characters are given specific names but the names are symbolic through the use of onomastic imagery. E.g. Angustias and Magdalena suggest anguish.

Martirio suggests martyrdom

Adela suggests going forward or overtake

Water is also an important symbol suggesting sexual potency. Bernarda's daughters often indicate their thirst. Adela says, "I woke up thirsty". Poncia senses the turmoil in Bernarda's household and warns her, "when you least expect it lightning strikes. There's a storm brewing in every room". Weather is symbolic too. All complain of the heat suggesting sexual frustration. Colours are employed as symbols. Bernarda and her daughters are dressed in black throughout the play which suggests death, oppression etc. Only Adela goes out in a green dress which suggests the jealousy she creates in her sisters and also could suggest her youthful passionate personality.

#### **d. Use of Folklore**

Lorca's familiarity with the folk world is brought out in Maria Josefa's lullaby to the lamb, which expresses her motherly instincts and her hatred of Bernarda.

### **1.2.7. Theatrical conventions in the play**

The settings of the play appear naturalistic portraying a real house in the countryside in Spain. But at the same time they are also stylized, the white walls evoking purity as well as the sterility and monotony of life in Bernarda's house.

Lorca is supposed to have moved closer to the Aristotelian standards for tragedy in this play. There is a key event around which the other events revolve. The play reminds one of Greek tragedy by its focus on ancestral household, its strong sense of fatalism and the cathartic quality of the final scene.

Structurally, Lorca's plays are skeletal. In other words, a lot of details in the story are left out and hence, the dialogues are pithy. The structure of the play is circular in the way it starts with Bernarda returning from a funeral and ends with her getting ready for another. Adela pays with her life in rebelling against the iron rule of Bernarda which does not seem to have any effect on the situation for Bernarda. She demands silence at the end of the play.

## 1.2.8. Activities

a. Comment on the following extracts relating them to theme/s, character.

- i. “A needle and thread for females: a mule and a whip for males. That is how it is for people born with means.”
- ii. “I’d rather carry sacks to the mill. Anything but sit in this dark room.”
- iii. “You should have seen to it everything was cleaner to receive the mourners. Get out! This is not where you belong.”
- iv. “Go home and criticize everything you’ve seen! I hope many years go by before you cross my threshold again”
- v. “Yes- to fill my house with their sweaty underclothes and poisoned tongues.”
- vi. “That’s what you should do: work and keep your mouth shut. It is the obligation of those who are paid to work.”
- vii. “What do they care about ugliness? All they care about is land, oxen and meek little dog to cook for them.”
- viii. “No, I won’t be quiet! I don’t like to see these old maids, itching to get married, their hearts turning to dust.”
- ix. “Anyway, it’s best for single women like you to know that 15 days after the wedding, a man leaves the bed for the table, then the table for the tavern. And any woman who doesn’t accept it rots away crying in a corner.”
- x. “I’m from the same school as your mother. One day he said something or other to me, and I killed all his finches with the pestle from my kitchen mortar.”

- b.** Identify all the animal images used in the play. Discuss their significance in highlighting theme and character.
- c.** Find information about the political background to Lorca's play *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

### **1.2.9. Questions**

1. "Bernarda's house serves as the central image in Lorca's play 'The House of Bernarda Alba'." Discuss.
2. How does Lorca deal with the theme of passion in his play *The House of Bernarda Alba*?
3. "Even though male characters do not appear on stage, male authority over females is strongly felt." Discuss this statement in relation to the play *The House of Bernarda Alba*

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## **02. NOVELS**

### **2.1. July's People by Nadine Gordimer**

#### **2.1.1. The Author**

##### **a. Life**

Nadine Gordimer was born in Springs, an East Rand mining town outside Johannesburg in the Transvaal region of South Africa in 1923. (Springs was the setting of her first novel – *The Long Days*, 1953) Gordimer's father was a jeweller from Latvia and her mother was of British descent. Growing up, Nadine was kept mostly indoors as her mother feared that Nadine had a weak heart. Kept at home most of the time Nadine started writing at the age of nine. The first story she published was 'The Quest for Seen Gold' which appeared in the Johannesburg Sunday Express in 1937. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

##### **b. Major works**

Nadine Gordimer has written thirteen novels. Most recently she has written *Loot and other Stories* (2004). She has to her credit nine volumes of short stories and three non-fiction collections.

##### **c. Status**

Gordimer has never had a large reading audience inside South Africa- South Africans have been either dissatisfied with her work or they have been kept from it through censorship. Internationally Gordimer is considered as the interpreter of South Africa through her novels and short stories.

#### **2.1.2. Genre**

In length, more a novella than a novel. Represents features of magic realism: characterized by a mixture of credible and utterly fantastic elements. However, *July's People* is often treated not as a

novel but as a prophecy. It could be viewed as a post-colonial text as well, in that it is concerned with the “processes and effects of, and reactions to European Colonialism”. (Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, 2004)

### **2.1.3. Background of the Novel**

The novel is set in the background of the uprisings of the 1970s. Nadine Gordimer presents a very bleak and cynical prophecy to both black and white South Africans. The prophecy suggests no solutions to problematic race relations in South Africa but Nadine Gordimer foresees an inevitable overthrow of the apartheid system of the South African nationalists. In neighboring Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, independence had been declared and consequently the termination of white rule was anticipated.

### **2.1.4. Plot of the Novel**

The events in *July's People* take place during a future revolution in South Africa. The writer does not write about a revolution. But the novel assumes such an event will happen and imagines its likely effect on a liberal white family. The white family accepts their servant's offer of refuge and flee to his village. The situation becomes very awkward with July waiting on them like a man Friday. The family waits to see the end of the war. But little by little the family's 'accoutrements of civilization' are given up, stolen or proved to be of no value in the new context. At the same time, the power relations of society are revealed as hollow. But the novel seems to offer hope in its self-awareness and in the children's immersion in village life. Their adaptability and integration into the black community offers a possible route to the construction of Gramsci's – 'interregnum' between the explosions of the old but before the birth of the new South Africa.

### **2.1.5. Setting of the Novel**

The events in July's People take place in the future in a hypothetical South African revolution. In the ensuing chaos traditional roles are overturned and new ones must be forged. In that sense the novel exists in Antonio Gramsci's 'interregnum'.

### **2.1.6. Themes in the Novel**

#### **a) The colonizer and the colonized 'other'.**

Both colonizer and the colonized are fixed in their roles. e.g. July in his now dual role as servant and host maintains his old habits of servility. But asserts himself as manipulator, manipulates the Smales as well as his people. e.g. His wife, mother, etc.

#### **b) Power**

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 became dependents of the blacks for sheer survival (their very lives depend on the generosity or otherwise of the black community) Within the Smales family there are role reversals.

#### **c) Body**

The situation is dealt with at a very personal level. The real discomfort and disruption of the revolution has been displaced to a new awareness of the physical body.

#### **d) 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' heroine bears within her

an ambiguity: while she commits herself to political causes, she often retains her inherited white privilege and thus remains outside the experiences of the ordinary. She may journey across the colour bar to 'taste' the life of black South Africans but usually return to the suburbs and her comfort zones. But future peace lies in adapting to the outlying culture. (the white children adapt easily)

**e) Feminism vs. patriarchy**

The white women (represented by Maureen) are feminists in their resistance to patriarchal structures but they are marginal (Maureen runs away rather than assert herself)

**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.

### **2.1.7. Characterization**

**a) 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 remains outside the experience of ordinary people. She makes rather an ineffective overture to July's People- his wife and mother but fails to establish a solid connection. Her marriage too cracks with the role reversals that she faces and white Bamford degenerates into domesticity and indifference, she flies to an unknown future.

**b) Bamford Smales**

The husband of Maureen represents the white male patriarch. He is the 'success story' – white, educated (an architect; an artist), 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 degenerates into domesticity (he cooks mealie meal and feeds his children) and takes over the roles earlier performed by Maureen (the female roles)

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

He is essentially hybrid. A man who has two lives – 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 title of the novel suggests this duality (or ambiguity) July's people refers both to his white people and the Smales family and 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.

**d) Martha**

July's tribal wife. She represents traditional culture i.e. sexuality, motherhood, wifehood. But she has gained the consumerism and acquisitive instincts of white culture through July, who has been sending both money and artifacts of that culture. She provides an effective contrast between the two cultures and their value systems. She is contrasted with Maureen. Maureen attempts to establish contact with her and fails because they have no common language to communicate with. But she demonstrates certain strengths of the tribal culture – tolerance, generosity.

**e) Lydia**

Maureen's maid in Johannesburg. She is a hybrid – the black who had integrated into white culture. Maureen's liberal outlook is brought out through her relationship with Lydia – an easy, informal relationship devoid of ethnic difference or hierarchy.

### **2.1.8. Narrative Technique**

The story is told from a third person point of view and the tone is that of dispassionate documentation. The voice reports on the activities and behaviour of the characters as they adjust to their marooned state. However the narration does not add information about the world that might explain the situation. This way the narrator knows only as much as the Smales know or less. As the focus of the story is Maureen, her thoughts are more often revealed as a result; the story told is filtered through her and by her body of knowledge. The reader loses track of the political background and must consider what the basics of the human relationship is.

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## **2.2. The Road From Elephant Pass by Nihal de Silva**

### **2.2.1. The Author**

Nihal De Silva's first novel '*The Road From Elephant Pass*' was published in 2003. He won the Gratiaen Prize in 2003 and the State Literary Award in 2004 for this debut novel. Using the experiences of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, De Silva has created a novel that teaches us a lot about character and social and political conflict, using the structure of a thriller.

### **2.2.2. Plot**

Sri Lanka Army Captain Wasantha Rathnayaka's seemingly simple mission to pick up an "LTTE" activist turned informant, woman militant Kamala Velaithan near the base camp at Elephant Pass and take her to Jaffna to be interrogated turns out to be a daring and a perilous journey of 10 long days through the untamed jungle of Wilpattu to Colombo. The perils faced by the two companions from the two opposing sides at war and the human bond and the camaraderie that springs out of the necessity to survive make Wasantha and Kamala learn a few things about themselves as well as examine their separate causes for fighting each other. The journey ends in understanding and developing a deep bond that has an impact on the lives of not only the two people involved but on many others too.

## **2.2.3. Characters**

### **2.2.3.1 Major Characters**

#### **a. Captain Wasantha Ratnayake**

The main protagonist of the novel. The novel explores different racial, ethnic and social issues from the point of view of Wasantha. He embodies the Sinhala ideologies of the South as opposed to those of the separatist dogmas of the North, but with educated reasoning. Wasantha's early life, related in fragments bring out the general hardships of the lower middle classes and their salvation through education. Mr. Karl plays an important role in Wasantha's education and later when he is faced with difficult situations his influence on Wasantha becomes imperative.

Wasantha develops as a character throughout the novel. He was initially angry and hostile towards the 'self assured' woman militant whom he had to pick up and deliver to Colombo. His initial dislike spills forth in his thoughts but he is too much of a gentleman and a soldier to voice them. But as the days progress and as they have to work together to face unknown and untold adversaries, his attitude changes. The understanding and the respect that blossoms between Wasantha and Kamala lead to a deeper bond and love that is selfless and that is capable of many a sacrifice.

Captain Wasantha, though a part of the military operations and the government machinery is capable of objectively critiquing the many faults within his own system. He is capable of seeing the jealousies and personal favours that govern the system and is aware of the administrative machinery and its untold failings. His impartiality and his objectivity nevertheless do not crowd out his sense of duty and his responsibility. This curious mixture is credited to the influence of Mr. Karl and his university education.

## **b. Kamala Velaithan**

An LTTE woman militant who is ready to undergo any hardship to fulfil her mission. Throughout the novel, Wasantha's point of view is complemented through Kamala's actions. She is created as the quintessential woman militant who is self sufficient and self preserving through her military training. But Kamala's strong feministic streak that runs thorough her character makes her a different individual too. Her strength surprises Capt. Wasantha, mainly because she is a woman. Kamala believes in the strength and the individuality of women but is also capable of feminine emotions of love, tender care and sacrifice.

Kamala Velaithan is portrayed as the refined, yet misled individual who supported the militant ideologies of a separate state. Kamala remembers her past among the Sinhalese with nostalgia coloured with hatred. Her background of the middle class educated parents makes her view certain fanatic practices of the 'movement' critically. But she is a cadre trained to think of herself as dispensable and keep a secret from the man she loves almost till the end. Kamala represents Tamils as an ethnic group as perceived by the majority of the Sinhalese as well the humane, reformable and almost repentant militants as wished by the others.

### **2.2.3.2 Minor characters**

#### **a. Mr. Karl**

Mr. Karl Dias was the mentor of Wasantha through his school years and during his university years. Though he is not present in the novel's actual incidents, Mr. Karl is referred to often in several flashbacks. His influence and guidance in Wasantha's formative years both as a means of teaching him English and teaching him of fauna and flora, especially avifauna shapes and moulds the story as it progresses. Mr. Karl becomes the means of the bridge that connects two warring communities, represented through Wasantha and Kamala, because he has instilled the love of nature in Wasantha which in turn becomes the common ground between him and Kamala.

## **b. Brigadier Balagalla**

Brigadier Balagalla is the means through which Wasantha is compelled to meet Kamala. Brig. Balagalla also represents the authority and the administrative machinery of the government. He is the prototype soldier who will think no means should be spared to get the information to win the war. His lack of concern for decorum and the feelings of the other party are brought out as a slight critique of the war machinery.

## **c. Pali**

Wasantha's friend who thinks that life is there to be enjoyed and explored despite the raging war that is destroying lives. He is the epitome of the majority of the unaffected civilians in Colombo. They all supported the war effort but were rational enough to see the other side of the story too, as long as it did not affect their haven of safety. For them, war was something to be fought and won, but nothing concerning their lives, or nothing worth taking note of, except in occasional news items.

### **2.2.4. Themes**

- Conflict: The theme of conflict runs throughout the novel, bringing in different perspectives and different sides of the same story. The conflict of interests in Wasantha and Kamala, the conflict of emotions from antagonism to love/to care and the conflict of ethnic identities is brought out in the novel.
- Mutual understanding: Understanding that develops between two individuals and the understanding that spreads to the two communities are explored in the novel. The importance of leaving space for individuality makes the arduous journey possible for Wasantha and Kamala while their mutual understanding and the respect that generates through it, make it possible for them to reach the goals, both personal and professional.

- War: One of the main themes in the novel is war. The war is fought by two opposing factions and is a war viewed in two different perspectives. The different perspectives of the two ethnic groups are presented through the main characters while a humane picture is drawn of the innocent sufferers who neither support nor oppose the LTTE or the government forces.
- Love: Love for one's cause and one's own individual goal later develops into a more personal yet a deeper bond between two individuals. Love between the two main characters is presented as a force that transcends the casual attraction to a deeper selfless love that can sacrifice for the sake of long term happiness.
- Empowered female identity: Kamala embodies the theme of female strength and the empowerment that can stand on par with male hierarchy and male authority. Her character brings out the theme of strong feminism that can withstand physical and emotional trauma despite the patriarchal norms of the feeble female.

### **2.2.5. Motifs**

- Birds and Wildlife: This is the recurrent motif that runs through the novel. Birds and wildlife is the common ground in which both Wasantha and Kamala can agree in the beginning. The avifauna thus symbolises the meeting point at which the warring communities can come to an agreement and thus gives a sense of hope.

### **2.2.6. Symbols**

- Wasantha: He is symbolic of the Southern Sinhala majority who were fighting a war with a separatist terrorist group to free the country. His initial notions about the terrorists and their cadres match the majority view. He is portrayed as typical of the majority who think that the war should be won, at any cost, because it was a war against separatists.
- Kamala: She is symbolic of the Northern Tamil minority who have taken up arms against the state because of the atrocities done to them during the black July of 1983. She represents the disgruntled and underprivileged Tamil minority that believed there should

be a separate state for them to be happy. They believed that the Sinhala majority lived in luxury while they suffered and refused to believe that the poor among both Sinhalese and Tamils suffered due to the ceaseless war.

- Pali: He is symbolic of the members of the middle class who were content to watch the war from afar. They were vociferous about the need to fight the terrorists and defeat them, but were reluctant to change their luxurious lifestyles.
- The journey through Wilpattu: The journey symbolises the journey of understanding that both communities need to take to overcome their animosities towards each other. The journey through what is almost no man's land, where neither the government forces nor the LTTE fighters can have the upper hand, reduces Wasantha and Kamala to two individuals devoid of their racial and ethnic baggage. Though fraught wrought with hardships, it generates mutual respect and understanding between the two individuals.

### **2.2.7. Techniques**

- Travelogue style: De Silva uses the style of a travelogue (which was a popular genre in Renaissance writing) to narrate the story. Tightly packed into 10 days, the novel traces the journey of the two protagonists while developing their characters as their journey progresses.
- Authentic Details: De Silva uses drawn-to-scale maps, newspaper articles and actual historical events to give a sense of authenticity to his novel. These techniques lend the novel legitimacy while still retaining the thrill of an action thriller.
- Time frame: The novel spans a period of 10 days. Through this, Nihal de Silva has kept the interest of the reader. The story moves fast. Furthermore, the timeframe intensifies the impact of the tightly packed action of the novel.

## **03. SHORT STORIES**

### **3.1. A Temporary matter by Jhumpa Lahiri**

#### **3.1.1. The Author**

Lahiri was born in London, England, in 1967. Her parents were natives of Bengal, India. The family moved to Rhode Island, which became Lahiri's home, with the father Amar taking up a job as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island, and mother taking up a job as a teacher's aide. The family (Lahiri) kept up close contact with relatives in India.

Lahiri has a B.A in English Literature from Barnard College, and from Boston University, an MA in English, Creative writing, and Comparative studies in literature and the arts.

Lahiri is married to Alberto Vourvoulis, a Gautemalan American journalist and has a son. They live in Brooklyn, New York

A Temporary Matter was first published in the New Yorker, and is the first story in her collection, Interpreter Maladies (1999). Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000, and the story Interpreter Maladies won an O Henry award and the PEN/Hemingway award in 1999.

#### **3.1.2. The plot**

Shobha and Shukumar, a young couple who have lost their first child at birth are trying to 'face life.

The death of the child has brought about a significant change in the two. In different ways they have lost interest in 'life' and the things that interested them.

Shobha has lost interest in cooking, entertaining, housekeeping, keeping herself trim and attractive, and has turned into a 'workholic', and exercises at the gym to keep herself fit.

Shukumar has turned into a lay about, reading novels, dishing out meals, and attending to the house, instead of attending to his studies.

Self realization or the power to face reality comes to them, through a temporary electricity cut for one hour which would coincide with their dining hour. During this darkness they 'see light', relating to each other the little falsehoods and deceits they have practised upon each other; voluntarily and involuntarily, intentionally and unintentionally.

The final unexpected realization – that the relationship is at an end–comes with the earlier –than– expected return of 'light'

In contrast to these two are Mr. and Mrs. Bradford who seem to be a loving couple going about hand in hand, observing social etiquette – sending a sympathy card when they hear of the still birth.

### **3.1.3. Themes**

- Individualism– the two work as separate individuals, with no anchorage. Society plays no part in their lives
- The inability to share sorrow in identical ways
- The break of a marital relationship
- The value/the need / the superfluity of offspring in a marriage
- Alienation – not belonging to any identified group/society
- Asians adopting Western culture/ Cultureless society

### **3.1.4. Characters**

#### **a. Shoba**

Starts as the more important character of the two, and the most important of all the characters, as it is about her that more information is given.

Shobha has been an outgoing person from the beginning; she had made lists of relatives who should be invited to the baby's 'ceremonies'. She had entertained nearly two hundred in her flat, given a surprise party to Shukumar. But in the basic things she had revealed a lack of sensitivity, has not been concerned about the baby, but the loss for herself; ready to blame the husband about the response, never shared her sorrow, but believed herself the more aggrieved of the two.

Her cooking, her entertaining has been for show, and she hasn't really changed, she's still for show- though in a different way.

She has a difficulty about sharing intimacy-her constant trips to India too have only left her with anecdotes.

### **b. Shukumar**

Shukumar's character is really the most significant because it is his character that develops, and it is he who responds to the personal tragedy in a 'personal' and intense manner.

He is totally incapable of concentration, of seeing any meaning in life after the loss of this child. He has held the child close, and observed it closely, even clung to it till the hospital has taken the baby away from him.

The kind of work he 'loses' himself in, is different from Shobha's, his is more introverted, while hers is extroverted.

### **c. The Bradfords**

The Bradfords don't grow beyond a contrast, for the sake of plot.

The relatives, the mothers – in – law don't develop as characters or are strong enough to provide a background of the constant trips to India. They don't even provide support to Shobha in her grief, except in a way to belittle Shukumar.

### 3.1.5. Techniques

–Narrative and ‘descriptive’ ; starts from the present, builds up the whole.

–suspense and irony

–Symbolism: trivial/blatant like the Bradfords or even like the temporary matter of the break in power, or even like the ‘game’ they play – that the two have been playing a game according to rules.

Shobha has followed the rules in a routine manner; it is Shukumar who has mastered the game.

Yet he is man enough not to have wanted to win.

### 3.1.6. Points to ponder

Compare with Hills like White Elephants

The wish to destroy the fetus – the reactions of the two, unmarriages as against the effort to come to terms with the loss of the fetus.

Ethical concerns of still – birth: are there any? But their responses raise ethical concerns

Any medical /personal concerns/ responsibilities: the couple seems not concerned-they only do not want to repeat the issue.

### 3.1.7. Activities

1. Find out about Asian immigrants and their way of life in the US.
2. What do you think would have happened if this incident occurred in another society, Asia / India?
3. Does the end of the story signal the end or continuity of the relationship between Shoba and Shukumar ?

## 3.2. Hills like White Elephants by Ernest Hemingway

### 3.2.1. The Author

- American novelist and short-story writer
- Born in Oak Park, Illinois
- Attended public schools in Illinois.
- After graduating from high school, worked as a reporter for the Kansas City Star in 1917.
- Leaving his job, served as a volunteer ambulance driver in Italy during World War 1.
- Later joined the Italian infantry and was severely wounded.
- After the war, served as a correspondent for the Toronto Star and then settled in Paris.
- Encouraged in creative work by the American expatriate writers Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein.
- Spent long periods of time in Key West, Florida, in Spain, in Africa and Cuba.
- Returned to Spain as a newspaper correspondent during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)
- Adventurous life brought him close to death several times.
- Moved to Ketchum, Idaho in 1958 and lived there until 1961, the year of his death by suicide.

### 3.2.2. Publication

- First published in Transition in August, 1927.
- Later published in New York by Scribner's in 1927 as part of a collection, Men Without Women.
- Soon after the publication of his 1926 novel, The Sun Also Rises, while living in Paris.

### 3.2.3. Setting

- The action takes place at a train station in Zaragoza, a major city in North– eastern Spain on the Ebro River.
- The time setting is not given but could be contemporary to the composition of the story in 1920s.
- Zaragoza is approximately 170 miles north – east of Madrid. The region around Zaragoza receives scant rainfall and the particular day is oppressively dry and the scenery in the valley is for the most part dry and barren.
- The greenery observed by Jig may have flourished through irrigation.

### 3.2.4. Plot

- A man and woman sit at a table in a pub at a train station in Zaragoza, Spain.
- They are on their way to Madrid.
- He orders for them: first beer, and then Anis del Toro (absinth, a powerful liqueur)
- The woman’s name is revealed as Jig and the man is identified only as an American in their conversation.
- While having drinks, they start talking about Jig’s pregnancy.
- She wants the child and hints that she would like to settle down.
- He wants her to abort the child, saying the procedure “is awfully simple” and “not really anything.”
- Afterwards, he says, life for them can continue as before.
- They go back and forth on the question of the child.
- Jig finally says perhaps with a taint of bitterness, that she will undergo the abortion “because I don’t care about me.”
- The man says he does not want her to have it “if you feel that way.”

- The climax occurs when Jig ends the conversation, saying, “Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?”
- Just before the train arrives, he asks her how she feels. “There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.” Whether these last two sentences of the story mean that she has decided to choose the baby over the abortion, or vice versa, or simply decided to put off a decision for another day is a matter for the reader to interpret.

### 3.2.5. Themes

#### a. Morality Vs Selfishness

- The American appears to be manipulating Jig in order to perpetuate a selfish life style in which she is a convenient outlet for his libido.  
“It’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig“ the man said. It’s not really an operation at all”
- He wants her to abort their baby so that they can continue their adventures.  
“Carpe diem! Seize the day! That is his way of living.
- He is defying the standards of conduct that are generally accepted as right or ‘proper’, to do an abortion for no valid reason.  
“And if I do it you’ll be happy and things will be like they were and you’ll love me? ”
- He is even willing to sacrifice a human life, Jig’s unborn child, so that he can continue their joyride.  
“Of course it does. But I don’t want anybody but you. I don’t want anyone else.”

## **b. Evasion of Responsibility**

- Jig in the story apparently wants to have the baby and settle down to a normal life. This is symbolized from her perspective by the greenery and thriving grain fields and the river on one side of the station.  
  
“ The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.” Traditional symbols of fertility.
- On the other hand the man wants her to abort their baby so that they can continue their adventurous, nomadic life.

### 3.3. Action and Reaction by Chitra Fernando

#### 3.3.1. 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 “Chitraklekha”. 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.

### 3.3.2. 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.

### 3.3.3. Characters in *Three Women* can be compared as follows:

- a. Missilin is a portrayal of a household female servant. She is subtly exploited by her mistress, Mrs. Ranasinghe who is respected as a pious woman in society.
- b. Echoing the characteristics of Mrs. Ranasinghe, *Loku Nanda* in Action and Reaction also exploits Kusuma, the adopted child cum servant.
- c. Missilin never resents her employer, but Kusuma replicates *Loku Nanda's* exploitation when *Loku Nanda* is physically feeble.

- d. While Missilin seems to receive the readers' sympathy, Kusuma may receive the readers' antipathy in Action and Reaction. Readers may feel sympathetic to Loku Nanda's plight towards the end of the story.
- e. 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.
- f. 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.
- g. Missilin was subtly exploited but she never reacted against Mrs Ranasinghe, and thus continues to receive the readers' sympathy.
- h. Kusuma gradually and astutely becomes the exploiter, replicating the role of Loku Nanda.
- i. Seela leaves her parents' exploitation and seems to find comfort in life with the help of another female character, her grandmother.
- j. 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.
- k. 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.

### 3.3.4. 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.

### 3.3.5. 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 hurt the other donator.

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 Title 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 skillfully 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

- **“*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?

### **3.3.6. 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
- exploits 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 piety. 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.

### **3.3.7. 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' 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 amma of the story. This technique helps the author to authenticate the narrators' voice.

Secondly, readers notice Mahinda' 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.

### **3.3.8. 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. It is used to indicate:

- Kinship terms such as *Loku Nanda*, Punched Nanda
- Expressions used in Buddhism such as Pirith , Bana, Mandape, sansara, karmic law, pinvethuni, dayaka, thanha
- Employments such as toddy tapper, Martin Mudalali'

- Appearance - 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 vocabulary related to Sri Lankans and Buddhism, may have helped her to draw a realistic portrait of these women and some social values.

### 3.3.9. 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 practical woman”?
- 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?

### **3.3.10. Summative questions for long answers:**

- “The protagonists in the short story deserve the readers’ sympathy”. How far do you agree with this statement? Discuss.
- What is the significance of the title to the main issues of the story?
- What are the movements in the story that indicate Mahinda’s development in understanding *Loku Nanda*’s plight ?
- Do you think that Mahinda’s development in his reasoning ability helps the author to give us a balanced picture of *Loku Nanda*? Justify your answer.
- “Every action has a reaction” How far has Chitra Fernando supported this view in her story – *Action and Reaction*.
- “Fernando is outspoken in exploring the popular perception of *Alms Giving* ”Discuss the story in the light of this comment.
- Critically analyze the relationship between Kusuma and *Loku Nanda* in *Action and Reaction*.
- “Mahinda’s growing awareness helps to create the intense structure of the story”. Analyze this statement.

- “*Action and Reaction* is a culture-bound, localized story of two individuals, therefore it lacks universality”. Discuss the issues presented in *Action and Reaction* in the light of this comment.

### **3.3.11. School-based activity:**

Study the Law of child adoption implemented in Sri Lanka (history, the rules, the year of implementation and other details), the advantages of it and some instances from media where people have broken the rules of child adoption etc. Create a debate in the class on the issue of Child Adoption in Sri Lanka.

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## 4. POETRY

### 4.1. Felix Randal by *G.M. Hopkins*

#### 4.1.1 Poet

G.M. Hopkins was born in 1844, to a middle class family. He went up to Oxford in 1863, where he was influenced by the great Cardinal Newman and was converted to Roman Catholicism. He entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and put aside the writing of poetry “as not belonging to my profession”. This poetic silence was terminated only in 1875, by the writing of the ‘**Wreck of the Deutschland**’ about the sacrifice of a group of German nuns who were crossing the North Sea to England when their boat sank in a storm. The poem was not well received. Even a Jesuit magazine rejected it. But it stimulated him to write poetry once more. And it signalled a land mark in Hopkins’s poetry, “a development quite beyond the reach of reasonable prediction”.

In his notable poems- and there are many - Hopkins shows a sensory vividness, a keenness in intelligence, “the two not inseparable qualities are together, and in distinctly individual form”. Eg: The Windhover : To Christ Our Lord, Binsey Poplars.

Hopkins died in Dublin in 1889, aged 44. His first collection was published in 1918.

#### 4.1.2. Genre

Difficult to stamp it into a particular genre as Hopkins’s poetry is very individualistic- particular to himself. However the poem broadly represents Victorian poetry in its romanticism- in theme, feeling and tone. But it has touches of the religious poetry of the metaphysical tradition in its ratiocination and thematic development. He also shows affinities with Pre-Raphaelitism.

**Pre Raphaelitism:** As a movement of art, which it originally was, Pre-Raphaelites, attempted to reveal truths through nature carefully observed and rendered brightly and precisely. The movement was given leadership particularly by writers like Dante Gabriel Rossetti. As a literary

movement, it is noted on the one hand for its crisp descriptions and sensuous details, and, on the other, for its power to suggest metaphysical states: to indicate philosophical and theological truths unobtrusively. (The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms (Ed) Ross Murfin and Supryia M-Ray)

### **4.1.3. Hopkins's innovative power**

Hopkins's great merit was that he was an innovator- in a sense a genius. His poetry has the hallmark of genius which was manifest in his creation of a vital technical agent known as Sprung Rhythm. It was this that galvanized the common materials which formed the subject matter of his poetry. Extracted from early verses or chants, the underlying principle of Sprung Rhythm relates to English as a stress timed language.

For Hopkins, a single stress made a single metrical foot, and it could equally well stand alone in the foot or be accompanied by any number of light, unstressed syllables. The effect created is that of expressive common speech. But for it to have the benefit of rhythmic form, a line will have its pattern of a number of feet, though a single foot can run into the next line. This creates syntactic compression which is the most significant feature of his poetry. (Hopkins; "the scanning runs on without a break from the beginning of, say, a stanza, to the end, and all the stanza is one long strain, though written in lines asunder")

### **4.1.4. The Poem**

In this Sonnet, Hopkins reflects on the long illness and death of Felix Randal. The poet watched this 'big-boned, and hardy-handsome' man decline, broken by "some fatal four disorders" and his "reason rambled....". He had rallied against his fate, but later, anointed by the poet-priest, he developed a "heavenlier heart" and "sweet reprieve". Apparently it is a reflection of a spiritual healer, on the 'healing' process. The poem deals with the paradox that physically strong men find it difficult to accept death. Felix suffered extremely. This seeing the sick endears them to us, us

too it endears” is the key to unlocking the meaning of the poem. A mutual bond develops between the healer and the healed; between the healed and the healer; a bond of compassion and trust. The healer’s (Priest’s) tongue and touch refreshed Felix, Randal’s tears also touched the priest’s heart. Their common humanity supported each other and revealed one to the other. This common humanity is also the basis of their ‘divinity’. “Sweet reprieve and ransome”. Felix Randal is a farrier, a man who shods horses. By his very calling, his very nature, he is an extremely ‘physical’ man- ‘mould of man’ (solid bone and flesh), ‘big boned and hardy- handsome’: a rough-hewn man who lived close to the earth (‘fleshed’) This extremely ‘physical’ man was broken by ‘fatal four disorders’. The nature of the ailment / sickness was as powerful as his physical body. The word ‘contended’ suggests the fury of the attack and its reception. The victim- ‘mould of man’ would not give in easily. But like all flesh, Felix’s body broke under the law of nature (God) and his sickness had its toll on his mind. Like all strong men;

“sickness broke him. Impatient he cursed at first.”

“reason rambled”

Felix became reconciled to his fate and achieved spiritual peace as a result of the ministration of the poet-priest. “a heavenlier heart began some months earlier”. The experience was mutually ennobling to both farrier and priest. It made the priest conscious of his deep human self, which is also the core of his spiritual distinction as a priest: “touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal.”

Felix has become the Poetpriest’s spiritual child. But the process had been hard and painful to both. He had been the epitome of physical strength “was powerful amidst peers”. This is transmitted in a highly concentrated manner in the last line:

“Didst fettle for the great dray horse his bright and battering sandal”

The rhythm in fettle (sprung rhythm) is echoed in the last word 'sandal'. The two words link syntactically and phonologically and convey the sound and force of the action. The image is evocative – both visually and auditorily. The imagery and the diction particularly its lyricism convey Hopkins's power as a poet. The poem seems to echo the poetry of the Metaphysicals- Donne and Herbert Randal's heart had been 'battered' to make him reconcile to his new situation and accept the peace of spiritual life. In a sense it is the struggle between the physical and the spiritual lives- a struggle that Hopkins himself was familiar with, between body and soul and the latter wins.

#### 4.1.5. Themes:

- The body and soul
- The priest as a healer of the spirit
- Physical work as being "earthly"
- Physical strength as a deterrent to spiritual strength
- Death and Life...
- Life of the flesh vs. life of the spirit
- The lasting bond between the healer and the healed.

#### 4.1.6. Techniques

(a) Rhetorical question - O he is dead then?

{suggesting wonder and disbelief. Randal was muscular and strong, not likely to die!

Alternatively, sorrow and perception of reality: At last this big, strong man has died }

(b) Metaphors - mould of man

- reason rambled

- fleshed there

- quenched thy tears

(c) Paradox - the sick endears themselves to us, us too it endears

(d) Alliteration - reason rambled.

Fatal four disorders.

Big- boned.

Heavenlier heart.

Great, grey.

Reprieve and ransom.

- (e) Onomatopoeia - Fettle, battering
- (f) Archaic language - didst, thou (which invests the poem with an aura of holiness)
- (g) Personification - Boisterous years
- (h) Sonnet form - an almost perfect Italian- style sonnet (two a-b quatrains the octave followed by two rhymed c-c-d stanzas in the sestet)
- (i) Sprung Rhythm - e.g Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy handsome.  
Did fettle for the grate gray dray horse his bright and battering sandal

## **4.2. Remembrance by Emily Bronte (1818-1848)**

### **4.2.1. The poet**

Emily Bronte (1818-1848) The Brontes were avid readers and had a thirst for learning. Their power of imagination was aroused through the casual event of the father bringing them a box of toy soldiers. The children adopted the soldiers as subjects of an imaginary kingdom, Charlotte and Branwell chose Angria as their kingdom and Emily and Jane chose Gondal.

The Brontes were unusually imaginative and emotionally very intense. They lived in seclusion, under the strict governance of their father the curate, and having lost their mother in early childhood, their imagination and sense of acute loneliness were heightened. Their experiences based on this background were reflected in their various works.

Their imagination was couched in prose and poetry, and the first volume of poems was published in 1846, when Emily was 28. The Brontes used androgynous names to get over contemporary prejudice against women as writers; they kept to their initials and adopted the name of Bell for Bronte and publish their works as Currer (Charlotte), Ellis (Emily) and Acton (Anne). All the Bronte sisters were equally talented, and Emily more so. Her own sister Charlotte (author of Jane Eyre) made this comment on reading the original manuscript of the poems that were printed. "Something more than surprise seized me- a deep conviction that these were not common effusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine; to my ear they had also a peculiar music, wild melancholy and elevating". This comment on Emily Bronte's poetry is equally valid for her person.

### **4.2.2. Genre**

A lyrical poem of eight stanzas of 4 lines each. There is a narrative element in the poem, although it does not carry a story, it relates to a biographical aspect of the poet.

### 4.2.3. The poem

The poem celebrates the love of Augusta for Julius Brenzaida, the emperor of the kingdom of Gondal who had been assassinated 15 years earlier. Time has not effaced the memory of her love. Committed to living by herself, her memory of her lover is still the guiding force. She looks for union even beyond the grave.

The kingdom of Gondal and these characters were imaginary creations of the poet. The poem shows how intensely the poet was able to give life to her creations

The poem is crafted very well, reaching out to the reader in spite of the “limited origin” of the poem

### 4.2.4. Themes

The poem deals with the inevitability of separation, permanence of love as against the impermanence of the body- a theme that Emily Bronte dealt with in Wuthering Heights .In Wuthering Heights Catherine and Heathcliff fulfill the love they could not achieve in this world beyond the grave.

### 4.2.5. Techniques

The poet employs the ordinary thoroughfare of poetry – imagery, metaphor, symbolism, and motif - very evocatively to reinforce the central idea of the power of love overcoming time and space.

The intensity of emotion is conveyed through the musical resonance evident in the poem, achieved through the repetition of key words and phrases and a liberal use of alliteration

**Note:** The single entry of this poem in the syllabus should serve the students as an introduction to Emily Bronte; an author with whom a student of literature should make definite contact.

## 4.3. Disabled by Wilfred Owen

### 4.3.1. The Poet

**Wilfred Edward Salter Owen** (18 March 1893 – 4 November 1918) was an English poet and soldier, regarded by many as one of the leading poets of the First World War. His shocking, realistic war poetry on the horrors of trench and gas warfare was heavily influenced by his friend Siegfried Sassoon and set in stark contrast to both the public perception of war at the time, and to the confidently patriotic verse written earlier by war poets such as Rupert Brooke. His education began at the Birkenhead Institute, and his earliest experiments in poetry began at the age of 17. During the latter part of 1914 and early 1915 Owen became increasingly aware of the magnitude of the War and in September 1915 enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. In March he was injured and suffered from concussion but returned to the front-line in April. In May he was caught in a shell-explosion and when his battalion was eventually relieved he was diagnosed as having shell-shock ('neurasthenia'). He was evacuated to England and on June 26th he arrived at Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh. It was here that he met Siegfried Sassoon who was also a patient. Sassoon already had a reputation as a poet and after an awkward introduction he agreed to look over Owen's poems. As well as encouraging Owen to continue, he introduced him to such literary figures as Robert Graves (a friend of Sassoon's) which in turn, after his release from hospital, allowed Owen to mix with such luminaries as Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells.

In June 1918 he rejoined his regiment at Scarborough and then in August he returned to France. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery at Amiens, but was killed on the 4th November whilst attempting to lead his men across the Sambre canal at Ors. The news of his death reached his parents on November 11th 1918, the day of the armistice.

### 4.3.2. The Poem

Disabled by Wilfred Owen, the majority of which focuses on a soldier's present condition rather than the past. The part that did focus on the past is more pessimistic than this portion. The poem seems realistic and personal as it portrays an image of one man's own experience during World War I. Owen wrote about the war because he was himself a poet and a soldier. Owen saw the disorder that war created. The poem is about a young man who went to war at an early age. A young man who didn't know why or what he was fighting for because "Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt, And Austria's, did not move him. (Stanza 5) "And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey," one can imagine that the soldier quivered at the thought of wearing that hideous and disgusting gray suit without legs and arms as well as because he felt weak. Throughout the poem, the man is troubled by the town's indifference toward him and the ungratefulness that was shown towards him after he returned home from the war. The wounded soldier cannot remember why he joined the war, but he was actually enlisted and at that moment he felt powerful because he had "no fears" and "he was drafted out with drums and cheers." The people were not receptive to his needs or wants. A football goal seemed to be more important than fighting for the country. The soldier was so depressed that he just wanted his caregivers to put him in his bed. The caregivers probably treated him as if he had no say or choice in his daily activities or life. "Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes /Passed from him to the strong men that were whole".

In line 10 Owen states that, " in the old times, before he threw away out his knees," This allows the reader to believe that his knees were actually physically removed from his body and were never to be used again. The reader is able to picture a man that cannot walk and he has to use a wheel chair in order to get around. The soldier is thinking about the time when he was a young boy and he was able to enjoy life with his family and friends. Also, he is thinking especially about how beautiful the young girls were and that they will never see him again as being tall and handsome. Now, he believes that others looked down on him and "All of them touch him like some queer disease"

### 4.3.3. Themes / Issues

- **War and the horrors of war** - the mental and physical torment of the young soldiers

The notion of unseen scars is also a recurring theme in Owen's war poetry. Wilfred Owen focused on the idea although the soldier may return home from war injured or alive their lives will never be the same both physically and mentally as they were prior to war.

- **The Indifference of the society**

This is seen in Disabled in which he describes how the man's (the soldier) pain is not only physical but also mental. It depends on how others around him react to his situation. Therefore, because of this he will never experience love and live life to its fullest ever again,

- **Isolation**
- **Tragedy of Disabled soldiers**

### 4.3.4. Techniques

- Rhyme
  - irregularities of rhyme reflect disorder.
  - half rhyme gives a dissonant, disturbing quality that amplified his theme.
- Use of visual imagery eg. wheeled chair, ghastly suit of grey, glow lamps ,leap of purple
- Irony eg. someone said he'd look a god in kilts, to please the giddy 'jilts'
- Sarcasm e.g. do whatever the rules consider wise , take what ever pity they may dole
- Alliteration eg. '**glow-lamps**' and '**girls glanced**'
- Assonance eg. play and pleasure after day
- Use of contrast- present and past
- Flash back- eg. '**Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal**'
- Symbolism eg. smart salutes , drums and cheers

- The use of reversal- eg- sporting hero to cripple, handsome to 'queer disease' ,colour to dark, warmth to cold.
- Language gives the poem an urgency and directness, and all the senses are utilized

### 4.3.5. Guide Lines

#### Activities

1. Find the words which give the isolation of the wounded soldier?

**Example-**'dark', 'grey' , and 'shivered'

2. Select words and phrases that support the reader to understand the life he led in the past and the life he is supposed to live now?
3. What is the subject matter of this poem?

The poem is a realistic and a personal portrayal of an image of one man's own experience during World War I.

4. How does the poet create the setting of this poem?

In stanza one, the poem presented a clear picture of a young soldier at a park or thinking about being at a park in a wheelchair; he had no legs. Owen allowed the reader to become aware of the man physical surrounding by stating in line one and in line three that "He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark, /Through the park."

5. Comment on the mood of the speaker?
6. Describe the attitude of the poet towards the subject matter?

### 4.3.6. Glossary

1. **'He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark'**

The immediate appearance of the wounded soldier sets up his isolation . It strikes a strong comparison to the warmth of the second stanza.

2. **'before he threw away his knees'**

The implication that this was a needless loss (sacrifice) is reinforced by where the wounded soldier fails to remember why he joined up, pointing only to a distant sense of duty, and euphoria after the football match.

3. **'Now he will never feel again how slim/Girls' waists are'**

Showing

not only the physical loss of his arm, but also the psychological scars as the soldier knows he will be shunned by women from now on.

4. **'younger than his youth'**

The implication is that his face now looks older than his real age, in contrast to the time before he joined the army when he looked younger than his age.

5. **'spurted from his thigh'**

The picture of blood spurting out of a cut vein vividly evokes the damage done to his thigh by the injury. The imagery plays on the continual point that his injuries, resulting from his enlisting in order to please his girlfriend and other admirers, has resulted in him being abhorrent to women.

6. **' a bloodsmear down his leg,/After the matches, carried shoulder-high'**

Again Owen uses irony effectively here. We are already aware that the soldier has lost an arm and his legs, yet here we are told that before the War he felt proud to have an injury, and to be carried shoulder-high (for reasons of celebration as opposed to helplessness).

7. **'a god in kilts'**

An indication that the soldier was a member of one of the Scottish regiments. This also implies that the soldier joined up for reasons of vanity.

8. **'giddy jilts'**

A Scottish term for a flirtatious young woman.

9. **'Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years'**

The sadness of the soldier's plight is heightened. Clearly he was under-aged when he enlisted and therefore is still young.

10. **'Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal'**

Recalls the image of the football match earlier. Implies that he was carried from the field shoulder-high, possibly as the result of scoring the winning goal. Here, despite having achieved far more, for far greater a loss than a 'blood- smeared leg', the crowd's reception is more hollow.

11. **“glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees”**

A

sense of euphoria and romance is in the air.

12. **'do what things the rules consider wise'**

The soldier's passivity is complete. The fine young athlete has been reduced to a state of dependence on others and helplessness (heightened by the pitiful closing repetition of 'Why don't they come?').

13. **'Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes/Passed from him to the strong men that were whole'**

Repeating the loss of the soldier, this time of his attractiveness to the opposite sex. 'Whole' implying that he is incomplete, less than a man. Ironically he is now dependent on young women to put him to bed, in contrast with his pre-war virile manhood when he could expect to take women to bed.

## 4.4. Mending Wall by Robert Frost

### 4.4.1. The Poet:

Robert Frost (1874-1963) was a well known American poet, teacher and a lecturer. He was a four times Pulitzer Prize winner as well as an often quoted 'nature' poet.

Robert Lee Frost was born in California and was brought up in an environment of books and reading by his teacher parents. Though the father died quite early in Frost's life, the mother took up teaching to support the children. Frost enjoyed school and graduated as the head of his class, but became disappointed with college. He dropped out of college and took up many jobs including teaching and working in a mill, while continuing to write poetry. In 1894, Frost got his first break as a poet, when *Independent*: a New York magazine published his poem, 'My Butterfly, An elegy'. One year later he married his college sweetheart, Elinor Miriam White, with whom he had six children.

The newly-weds continued to teach and in 1897 Frost entered Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but was forced to leave before completing his degree due to sickness. In 1900 the family moved to a farm in New Hampshire, which inspired some of his later poems. The period was traumatic for Frost because he lost his mother as well as two children during this period. But the chores and the atmosphere calmed and soothed him too.

In 1911, the family moved to England and in 1913, Frost's first collection of poems, 'A Boy's Will' was published in England. It brought him recognition, fame and a life long journey of lecture tours to reach his growing fan base. Though Frost's later years were marked with accolades as well as tragedies, he still continues to inspire and enthrall readers. He died on the 29th of January 1963 in Boston, Massachusetts. He was praised by the American president John F. Kennedy saying "The death of Robert Frost leaves a vacancy in the American spirit....His death impoverishes us all; but he has bequeathed his Nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever gain joy and understanding."

## **4.4.2. The Poem**

### **4.4.2.1 Title**

The title of the poem 'The Mending Wall' talks about a spring mending time in New England farming practice. This tells you about a calendar event that can be foreseen in a farmer's life. The title also suggests that the wall was already in existence and that it is being repaired/ mended during the incident described in the poem. It further gives the reader a hint about the subject of the poem. As the poem is going to talk about mending a wall, the reader is alert to the nuances and the minor details the 'mending' might bring out.

### **4.4.2.2. Form**

The poem was written using the free verse/ blank verse technique popular with American literature. There is no separation of lines and stanzas but the thoughts and conversations are separated through the use of aptly used punctuation marks. The poem uses a conversational narrative form with an omnipresent narrator to bring out the incidents in the poem.

### **4.4.2.3. Context/ Situation**

The poem describes a situation where two neighbours get together to mend a wall that separates their adjoining plots. The activity takes place every year and one neighbour is observing the futility of the action, because there is no logical reason for building a wall there. But the other neighbour prefers to stick to the tradition, because 'Good fences make good neighbours'.

### **4.4.2.4. Images used**

The image of a wall, which is being repaired, is used as the predominant image of the poem. Rural imagery of a farm is used to bring out the message of the poem as well as to bring out the pristine quality of nature through the poem too.

#### 4.4.2.5. Analysis

Frost opens the poem with the line, 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall,' making it a universal truth. The generalised statement which hints at the unforeseen forces makes the reader prepared for his analysis of the reasons for a wall to decay. The wintry swell in the ground which creates the wall to break off and the general human activities which further make the gaps in the wall are made into mysterious activities, 'No one has seen them made or heard them made,'. The mysterious reasons continue. But at this moment Frost decides to change the direction of the poetic persona's attention, to his neighbour.

The narrator, though not a great fan of the wall, still decides to let his neighbour know of the time to mend the wall. The need to keep up with the tradition, suggests that maybe, though the 'wall' is not necessary, it maybe a sign of continuing respect for his neighbour and his wishes.

'We keep the wall between us as we go', the neighbours mend the wall while still being on their respective sides of the wall. The camaraderie and the neighbourliness is being maintained while one's own private space is being preserved. The wall here can be seen as a metaphor for human individuality, that all of us struggle to preserve, while trying to remain social beings. The great American individualism too is slightly mocked through these lines. To maintain their own spaces, people have to interact with each other, making a mockery of the whole individuality issue.

Frost carries his argument of the need to have individuality (a 'wall' to separate) further when he states, 'My apple trees will never get across / and eat the cones under his pines,'. The 'wall' therefore is not needed, but his neighbour insists on holding on to the tradition and practices of his father. Frost uses mild satire to criticise the neighbour's blind following of traditions. For the poet, the spring mending is just another game, where friendships are renewed with his neighbour.

Once again the opening line is repeated, emphasising the importance of the statement and through the poetic persona, Frost hints at the unseen force's origin. He wants his neighbour to understand for himself, that there is a force that is against all these boundary markings, and that maybe

nature. The tradition of carving out one's own niche has continued against the universal force that is all for unity.

Through the poem, Frost tries to bring out the idyllic peace of a farmer's life while at the same time; he is trying to convey a deeper meaning using the dramatic and distinct characters of his poem. The use of understatement emphasises the importance of acknowledging a larger and an omniscient force amongst us, while he gives us enough clues to guess the larger force that is there in our lives. The poem can be read as a simple nature poem while it can be also read as a metaphor for human individuality too. Even though the neighbour understands the futility of mending the every spring, he continues to do so, just like all humans continue to maintain individuality, while fully understanding the futility in the real situation.

#### **4.4.3. SBA suggestions**

- Collect other similar poems of Robert Frost, that bring out his involvement with 'nature and present to the class.

#### **4.4.4. Questions**

- 'Robert Frost tries to convey a deeper meaning than the simple action of mending a wall through his poem, *Mending Wall*' Discuss with examples from the poem
- 'Walls are made to be broken' Is this true? Discuss with relevant examples from the poem.

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## **4.5. Preludes by TS Eliot**

### **4.5.1 The Poet:**

Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri of what was known as ‘an old New England family’.

He was educated at Harvard; he read philosophy at the Sorbonne, Harvard and Merton College, Oxford.

He settled in England and worked as a school master and clerk, and later as the literary editor for the publishing house of Faber and Faber.

In 1927 he became a British citizen and entered the Anglican Church.

### **4.5.2 Modern Poetry**

The term ‘modern’ is not limited to ‘contemporariness’, as belonging to the times, but stands for a type of literary ‘genre’. Modernism is not limited to the expression of “current times”, is the precursor to postmodernist literature: both these terms have to be understood as only limitedly related to the ‘current times’.

Historically ‘modern times’ start from after the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, closely associated with the First World War going up to the second. For the first time, the ‘countries’ of Europe found themselves changing sides, their age old rivalries tested against the unknown. In addition the shattering discoveries and inventions continued unabated, causing massive upheavals in the day to day lives of man as well as in his age old convictions.

The years between the two wars saw a revolution in English literature, it has gravitated from being European to being American. English literature has become Anglo-American,

The majority of those associated with the modern movement were not ‘English’-Eliot was American, Yeats and Joyce were Irish.

Internationalism is seen as one natural characteristic of modernity, and is so even today. As far back as in 1959 (The Sunday Times February 1 UK) the famed critic Edmund Wilson commented on what we now see as globalization : he said that ‘the whole world is getting to be more alike in certain ways, and society thus is more or less all the same everywhere, ‘ that national literatures and all that are becoming less important’.

‘Modern poetry’ sought to reflect this new phenomenon, this ‘confusion’ man had to face. ‘The centre does not hold’ said Yeats, Eliot looked for roots in the world that has been reduced to meaninglessness: ‘What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish...?’ Modern poetry then reflects this search for meaning, couched in a new language, in a new mode. It was felt that the earliest, traditional modes would not suffice for this task.

It is Eliot’s name that comes spontaneously with the discourse on modern poetry along with Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound: ‘The men of 1914’ as they were called, were instrumental in taking English poetry to a different sphere. They saw a crisis in Western values and saw alienation and disinherited minds. With this overt consciousness of a ‘modernity’ they set out to write deliberately away from the traditional subjects, modes and techniques. It is this that marks a milestone in the history of English poetry.

In this deliberate effort to be different from the ancients and thus modern, Eliot sought in his poetry to show that coherence and validity of thought had nothing to do with poetry. He therefore wrote in a sequence or series of images which had no ‘inherent’ or suggested rationale, but a rationale based on memory. (‘Memory throws up high and dry ...twisted images’). The logic or order of imagination is neither controlled nor guided by thought.

This is close to the ‘Imagist technique’ and’ the stream of consciousness technique’, yet it is not either as the flood of images is devoid of narrative detail or logical continuity.

Eliot tried to explain what he was attempting to do in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ in *The Sacred Wood*; he said that a new work should both cohere with the past and alter or be different to

that which it coheres. However in explicating, he gave primacy to the individual in that not only the best, but 'all of the parts' of the individual poet's work may be taken, and that the poet must be 'aware of the literature of Europe as well as the whole of the literature of his own country'. With this injunction it seems at best one can only reach a disjointed wholeness.

Eliot's notion of tradition was problematic in this sense, that as a modernist he seeks to reject the traditional, and yet he needs to base his work on something, somewhere. In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot considers tradition valuable and acquirable as a matter of habit, local association, use and wont and orthodoxy as more important, and therefore to be actively acquired.

### **4.5.3. Techniques and Language**

Eliot's and the modern poets' biggest contribution to English verse was in the introduction of 'free verse'. In fact 'free verse' is a major characteristic of modern poetry. in all the literatures of the world.

Free verse has to be understood as being different from traditional verse, which was regular metrical verse. Free verse has lines of irregular length, with the variations of length not being governed by any 'principle' or any definite pattern. The preponderance of lines may or may not have the length of the standard ten syllable lines-the English heroic line.

The short lines may be very short , and there may be more short lines than long lines.

The longer lines may be very long and not assignable to any standard recognizable metrical arrangement.

Rhyme is not totally absent, characteristically rhyme too like the meter does not fall into a pattern, there is no regularity. However rhyme can be sometimes seen to make a strong presence in couplets or alternate positions.

In reading free verse aloud, one cannot help but read it as one would read blank verse. 'Meaning' is discovered in the rendering of this verse, with the images echoing some sort of recurrence of sound pattern, though irregular.

Taking the logic of free verse to its natural conclusion, the question has to be asked, does one have to 'read free verse' aloud? Is there a difference in the effect of silent reading as against loud reading or reciting?

In adopting 'free verse' too the influence of Europe – France can be seen. The movement of 'free verse' has a longer and more sustainable history in France. The French make a distinction between *verse libre* – verse that is born free and *vers libere* -verse which has been liberated from some constriction. The traditional French poetical code is considered more strict than the English with insistence on the exact placing of the caesura, the masculine and the feminine endings.

Free verse today is known also as cadenced verse based on rhythmical patterns.

The boundaries between prose and verse are no longer so clear as they were. The practice of free verse, which is in essence an attempt to isolate a personal organic, meditative rhythm, without reference to any of the accepted metrical patterns, strongly resembles the careful and self-conscious organization of good prose.

Free verse has the rhythm of the spoken word. The technique is daring and innovative. It has lent itself to the establishment of a new poetic diction too. Subjects and areas that have never lent themselves to poetry are now found firmly entrenched in poetry.

Language too is made to represent the complex times, in 'conflicts in language', making the poetry obscure and difficult.

#### 4.5.4 Reading the poet through the man

The individual aspect that Eliot and the modernists sought to express through poetry is well represented in Eliot in a personal sense.

Eliot seems to have inherited contradictions: he was born in St Louis, a place known as ‘Western-most eastern city’. In the North were the dissected tall planes, in the South were Ozark Mountains; the Missouri river divided the two. The confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri is located near St Louis. Writing to the Paris Review Eliot has said, ‘My poetry wouldn’t be what it is if I’d been born in England, and it wouldn’t be what it is if I stayed in America, it is a combination of things, but its sources, in its emotional springs it comes from America’.

To start with Eliot was almost an agnostic, questioning Western values, and Christianity, but later he entered the Anglican Church. From *Prufrock* in 1917 to *Wasteland* in 1922 which were negative he moved on to religious explorations and an assertion of Christian values to *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935, to *Family Reunion* in 1937 to *Four Quartets* in 1943.

#### 4.5.5. Preludes 1888

*Preludes* belongs to the early period, where Eliot questions Western values and the Christian mores.

The poem is perhaps a ‘criticism’ of Wordsworth’s *Preludes* where is found the strong steady coherent romanticism of the poet’s thoughts and feelings. Against this is the disjointed picture built by Eliot with no central ‘narrator’.

Stanzas are numbered 1-4.

**Stanza (i)** gives a picture of a winter evening. The images – the pictures though not ‘poetic’ are very powerful. It is almost Keatsian in the evocation of the sensory images;

e.g.

‘smells of steak’ – olfactory,

‘burnt out ends of smoky days’ – rich, conjuring the cigarette stubs as well as the foggy evening.

‘grimy scraps’/ ‘withered leaves’ / ‘newspapers wrapping round the feet’ – repulsive, tactile

‘beat on broken blinds’/ ‘chimney pots’ – auditory

‘stamping cab horse’/ ‘steaming’ – visual

‘lighting of the lamps – sense of finality, ironical, inaction night/sleep.

### **stanza (ii)**

Expresses a ‘Sense of disgust’, ‘meaninglessness’, ‘consciousness of the negative’ – a kind of hang-over

‘sawdust’ – associated with covering up unpleasant things, vomit/blood/mud.

‘dinghy shades’ – lack luster lives

(Compare with a morning described by William Wordsworth “Earth has nothing to show more fair”)

### **stanza (iii)**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> person ‘You’ to generalize, a woman, presumably since it is someone with hair curlers; inactive, negative reflections,

‘light crept up’ – associated with the last line of stanza (i)

'the thousand sordid images' - the vision of the street—do they tie up with masquerades of stanza

(ii)? Is the thousand for 'facilitating rhythm? Any other meaning? Just a large number

While these do not cohere, nor do they violently obstruct reaching a meaning.

### **Stanza (iv)**

'mystic? his soul' – reminiscent of the ire of God/ Satan visiting Faustus?

Lacking in power

'stretched, trampled. stuffed, impatient' - Actions denote discomfort

'The notion' – infinitely gentle/suffering Christ?

'laugh' -criticism of this irrational faith

'ancient gathering fuel in recant lots,' – people reduced to seeking desperately

The poem conveys the poet's disenchantment with himself and the world.

Does it have anything more?

What cumulative effect do the 'pictures' have?

What is your reaction to the poem?

## **Finally an assessment of Eliot's 'contribution'/position in modern poetry.**

Ref. *Image and Experience* Graham Hough.

Graham Hough is critical of what Eliot attempted to do in breaking totally from tradition. He also says that the insistence on the individual was unrealistic and baseless. The following are excerpts from his *Image and Experience*.

- ... the revolution of 1914 is different from the Romantic in that it was 'antipathetic to ancient and deep rooted tendencies'.

- 'There is no other poem of any significance remotely like the Wasteland; the merits and the ordinance of Pound's *Propertius* have had no successors whatever; no one has ever seriously attempted to emulate Joyce's most characteristic experiments...'

- ...where immediate communication between poet and reader fails on two planes; both on the plane of reference, all that is ordinarily called the sense of the poem; and on the plane of feeling, the emotional attitude towards the situation presented.'

- ..Whatever tradition Imagist poetry may have recalled us to, the most important tradition of all, that of a natural community of understanding between poet and reader, has been lost'.

..Pound and Eliot, the two poets of our day who have shown themselves most sensitive to rhythm, and have done the most to quicken a sense of linguistic decorum, should have practiced so much insertion..'

## **4.6. Mirror” by Sylvia Plath**

### **4.6.1. About the Author:**

Plath (1932 – 1963) was born in Massachusetts, USA to a German immigrant, Professor Otto Emil Plath, and his wife, Aurelia Plath, a teacher. The sudden death of Plath’s father, from complications arising from diabetes, when she was a mere 8 year-old, had an indelible impact on her life and a significant impact on her poetry.

In 1950, she received a scholarship to study at Smith College, where she was determined to achieve academic and social success. This anxiety to excel, coupled with the recurrent depression that had affected her for most of her life, finally took a toll on her and she made the first of many attempts to take her own life by overdosing on sleeping pills in 1953.

After her recovery, she returned to college in 1954 and graduated in 1955, receiving a Fulbright scholarship to study in Newnham College, Cambridge. While at Newnham she met, and later married, the poet Ted Hughes.

The two soon returned to America where Hughes gained immediate prominence and success as a writer, while Plath was compelled to take up a teaching position at Smith College. In 1959, they returned to England, where they had two children. Their marriage soon felt the strain of Hughes’ various infidelities and quickly led to severe struggles with depression for Plath, eventually resulting in her suicide in 1963.

### **4.6.2 About the Poem:**

Since only a single volume of Plath’s poetry was published during her lifetime, “Mirror” (written in 1961, two years before her suicide, during her most prolific period as a writer) appeared in the posthumously published collection *Crossing the Water: Transitional Poems (1971)*. The poem, like many others written during this two year period and collected in the book *Ariel*, is dark, unsettling and full of despair. Written from the mirror’s perspective, it seems to be a light-hearted

observation about the honesty and accuracy of the mirror. However, the poem changes dramatically by the second stanza, as the woman finds her reflection in the mirror (or by this point, lake) to be an unwanted reminder of her age and mortality.

### **4.6.3 Analysis:**

The poem is narrated in the first person and the terse, chopped phrasing of the opening line serves to establish the mirror's persona as blunt, honest and unemotional. This persona is further strengthened by the next few lines, where the mirror comments on its involuntary action of reflecting anything it sees ("Whatever I see I swallow immediately"), and its affirmation of its intent to be merely "truthful" not "cruel". This denial of cruelty seems based on the premise that truth cannot be equated with cruelty. The mirror is also acutely conscious of the power it wields and presents itself as "little god" – omniscient and all powerful.

The last four lines of the first stanza are a good example of the dry humour found in Plath's poetry. However, they also serve to convey the meticulous and somewhat unforgiving nature of the mirror, which reflects both the colour of the wall and its minor imperfections ("speckles"). The lines also hint at a contradiction in the mirror's persona as distant and unemotional, for it seems to have formed an attachment to the wall ("I think it is part of my heart") and seems disappointed when they are separated from each other by "faces and darkness".

The second stanza is much darker in tone and mood than the first. The mirror now takes on the appearance of a lake and an allusion is made to the myth of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in a river and drowned as a result. It is interesting however, that although the woman bends over the lake as Narcissus did; she is repelled by what she sees and filled with self-loathing. The use of the lake is also appropriate as it suggests depth, thus being much more conducive to the woman's search for truth and identity ("Searching my reaches for what she really is"). However, her yearning for the truth is overpowered by her need for comfort and affirmation, as she rejects the mirror and turns towards the softer and more forgiving light of "the candles and the moon". It is interesting that neither of these can truly "reflect" her as the mirror does, but their appeal lies in the fact that they make her "appear" to look better in the eyes of

others. The contrast between the stark realism of the mirror and the comforting illusion of the candles/moon is obvious.

Even in the face of this rejection the mirror continues to perform its duty diligently, realizing the importance the woman places on it and the reflection it provides. (“I am important to her”).

The poem reaches its climax in the last two lines. The lake imagery is developed further and the mirror becomes a grim reminder of the woman’s own lost youth and beauty. The use of the simile “like a terrible fish” underlines the transformation that has taken place in the woman, as her face is now made grotesque by the passing of time.

The poignancy in the poem lies in the fact that the woman constantly seeks comfort in the mirror – the one thing that visually represents how far she has fallen from what she was in her youth.

#### **4.6.4 Structure:**

The poem is written in 2 stanzas of 9 lines each, and it is noteworthy that even the structure of the poem is in keeping with the idea of mirroring, where one verse seems to mirror the other.

#### **4.6.5 Themes:**

- **A search for identity/self** – an individual search for self is clearly seen in the poem as the woman tries to understand “what she really is”. Though there is a genuine desire in the woman to discover who/what she really is, Plath also highlights an unwillingness to accept that truth that provides another dimension to this theme.
- **Appearances** – the poem explores the importance and transience of appearance. This theme is closely connected to the search for identity, as the woman tries to understand herself by looking at her physical appearance.
- **Death** – the woman is rudely reminded of her own mortality by the mirror that records every detail of her “decline”.
- **Stereotypical Gender Roles** – the woman in the poem obviously subscribes to a stereotypical gender role ascribed to her by her culture – which is why she is obsessed with her youth and beauty, and so disturbed by the understanding that her beauty has faded.

- **The Passage of Time** – a mirror is a certain and determined recorder of the passing of time. In the poem too, it records the decline in the woman due to the ravages of time, though interestingly, time does not affect the mirror at all.
- **Transformation** – the inanimate mirror is first transformed into a speaking, feeling narrator, and then into a lake; the woman is transformed from a young girl to an old woman.

#### 4.6.6 Techniques:

- Personification
- First person point of view
- Metaphors – e.g. the lake metaphor
- Symbols – candles, the moon (with definite Romantic associations)
- Allusions to Classical Mythology – e.g. Narcissus
- Contrast
- Rhythm

#### 4.6.7 Suggested SBA Activities:

- Find a book or surf the Internet and read out about the Greek myth of Narcissus. Find out if there are any English words that stem from this story. How applicable is the myth of Narcissus to what Plath is saying in this poem?
- Read Oscar Wilde’s “The Picture of Dorian Gray” and try to find similarities between that text and Plath’s poem.

#### 4.6.8 Possible Questions:

- What characteristics of the mirror and its owner are revealed in the poem **Mirror** by Sylvia Plath?
- “**Mirror** is a poem that deals with a woman’s struggle with identity and impending old age.” Do you agree?

## **4.7. My dreams, my works must wait till after hell by**

### **Gwendolyn Brooks**

#### **4.7.1. The Poet**

African-American writer Gwendolyn Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1917 and brought up in Chicago since her childhood. Although at the beginning of her formal education, she attended a leading, predominantly white high school in the city, she was transferred to an “all black” school later. In 1936 she graduated from Wilson Junior College.

Brooks was a prolific writer and is highly regarded as she is the first black author to win the Pulitzer Prize. She is the author of more than twenty books of poetry, including *Children Coming Home* (1991); *Blacks* (1987); *To Disembark* (1981); *The Near-Johannesburg Boy and Other Poems* (1986); *Riot* (1969); *In the Mecca* (1968); *The Bean Eaters* (1960); *Annie Allen* (1949), and *a Street in Bronzeville* (1945). She also wrote a novel, *Maud Martha* (1953). In 1968 she was named Poet Laureate for the state of Illinois, and from 1985-86 she was Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. She received an American Academy of Arts and Letters award, the Frost Medal, a National Endowment for the Arts award, the Shelley Memorial Award, and fellowships from The Academy of American Poets and the Guggenheim Foundation. She lived in Chicago until her death in 2000.

#### **4.7.2 Background to African-American literature:**

African-American poetry is a powerful force in the literary scene. Jayne Cortez, Gwendolyn Brooks, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown are some of the early key figures of African American literature. African-American writing was born out of many experiences encountered by the black people living in America. Some key issues which influence black writing are:

**a. Civil War** was fought between the Northern and Southern states from 1861 to 1865. Among many causes for the Civil War, one main one was slavery (experienced by black people): the southern states decided to secede from the United States and form a new nation. However, after four years of war, the Southern surrendered to the North. (Slavery is a system in which people are treated as personal property. This was abolished legally after the Civil War)

**b. The civil rights movement** was a national effort especially during 1950s and 1960s with the aim of achieving equal rights for African American people in America. These civil rights workers protested against segregation and racial injustice: one prominent leader of the civil rights movement was Reverend Martin Luther King. “I have a dream...” is a well-known extract from a speech given by him during the struggle for civil rights in the 1963. This speech described his dream which was to see peace on one hand and equality on the other – for both blacks and whites. Civil rights activists used nonviolence as a method to protest against segregation. To protest against segregation in public areas like buses, restaurants, blacks would sit in places reserved for whites and vice versa. Although they were beaten by some who wanted segregation, the protesters maintained non-violence as means of protest.

### **c. The Harlem Renaissance**

The Harlem Renaissance which started after World War I and ended around 1935 during the Great Depression is a literary, intellectual and artistic movement in Harlem in New York. During this period, a group of African-American writers produced a significant body of literature. The experiences of black people and the interpretation of black people was the origin of this movement, as until then, they were described, and stereotyped by white writers. However, the cultural emancipation of the African-American that began before the First World War inspired the black people to identify a force within them, and this realization manifested itself in the Harlem Renaissance making it the most productive period in African-American writing. The African-

American community of Harlem was the centre of this renaissance, although its influence spread throughout the nation.

A prominent writer, during the early part of this period, W.E.B. Du Bois, challenging the old concepts and misinterpretations of stereotyped African-American life, introduced the notion of “twoness”, the African-Americans’ awareness of a dual identity that was based on that of an American and a “negro”.

During the Harlem Renaissance, many other writers such as Maya Angelou, Rita Dove and Booker T. Washington explored the common experiences encountered by blacks. Some of these issues include racial consciousness – back to Africa --, racial exploitation, marginality, alienation and racial integration. In addition, these black writers decanonized the conventional literary practices by using African cultural traditions in literature: some of them include the blues tradition, folk material, jazz, spirituals, dramatic revues and painting styles.

#### **4.7.3 Genre of the poem**

This is a lyric poem comprising 14 rhyming lines of equal length of ABABCDCDEFEGG rhyme scheme. It is also a first person narration. As Brooks describes, this is also one of her “folksy narrative”.

#### **4.7.4 Analysis of the poem**

The poem displays Brooks’ political consciousness of the contemporary issues of the period which reflect the civil rights activism. She employs a first person narration of a soldier in the poem. The soldier’s perseverance, endurance, commitment and heroism are brought out throughout the poem: he keeps going “pointing his eye” at “hell”, hoping to take the last “dregs” of hell or destruction.

Although he is “hungry” he is never desperate and gives up his desires.

What is interesting is that that he is alive perhaps because his “taste” to be back at his roots is not lost in him.

Thus, this poem generally is about the qualities of a war hero, perhaps of a black soldier who has not given up his hopes for the victory in fighting, to achieve the rights of the Black people. “Honey” and “bread” of his life, that is the sweet pleasant past life, is stored until the persona comes “home”, enduring “hell”: the persona is not insensitive to the “taste” of his past life as he is not coarsened by the experiences of the hell. The speaker dreams to be back at his home as a victorious person.

#### **4.7.5 Theme of the poem**

In this poem, Brooks mirrors an African-American experience of the contemporary period. Black people living in America can be seen as hybrids trapped between two cultures -- native or root culture, that is Black and the alien or the others’ culture that is American. Because of this split experience encountered by African-Americans, some Black people may suffer from a loss of identity whereas some others, being patriotic, may constantly inspire to be “back” at their roots, as they still respond more to their root culture. The persona of “My dreams, my works...”, while being engaged in a journey of hardship, is in need of going back to his/her roots. S/he has not lost his/her love towards his/her roots. The persona of the poem perceives the present world s/he is exploring as “hell” – an extremely unpleasant and difficult experience. S/he endures much to be back at his/her roots to fulfill his/hunger with “honey “ and “bread”, that is his/her own identity, On the other hand, to make himself/herself a complete persona, s/he waits to be back at his/her roots. Thus, the speaker of this poem is not shown as a person who is lost between two cultures, but a person who works hard and dreams and waits to achieve his/her goal – the black identity. Thus, it is a poem that celebrates black identity or negritude metaphorically. The poem also reminds the readers of the dream of the well-read speech of Reverend Martin Luther King -- “I have a dream...”

#### 4.7.6 Poetic devices and language

- Use of symbols – the words such as “hell”, “honey”, “bread” are used to symbolise the unpleasant and the pleasant settings respectively.
- Juxtaposition of scenes: Hunger and incompleteness in the present world are juxtaposed with taste and sensitivity of the future, thus, indicating a positive future for blacks. The writer draws a comparison between the two worlds experienced by blacks: on one hand the “hell” with “devil days”, on the other hand “home” with “honey and bread”.
- Rhyming lines and words to maintain the lyrical quality of the poem.
- Language: Simplicity of language is specific in this narrative. Simplicity employed by her also adds to the narrative feature of the poem.

#### **School-Based Activity**

Ask students to find information on the experiences of African-Americans, especially in the past. In groups, ask them to write mini-scripts based on the most interesting experiences. Let them dramatize (10 minutes for each group) them – the life encountered between White and Black people in America. They may refer to Harlem Renaissance, the Civil War, and other socio-political conflicts.

#### **Questions for teaching:**

- The poet is anxious about something pleasant. How powerful is this idea to present the main idea of the poem? Discuss.
- What is the mood created by the poem?
- Do you find the ideas of the poem powerful and convincing? List a few phrases to support your answer.
- Find phrases that indicate the life of a soldier.
- Do you find any explicitly stated details about racial consciousness in the poem?

- Explain the lines, “I am very hungry, I am incomplete”, “Be firm till I return from hell” in relation to the theme of the poem.
- What is the overall message conveyed in the poem? Justify your answer.
- *My* and *me* are two words commonly used in the poem. Why do you think the poet has used them repeatedly?
- The choice of words used in the poem does not suggest a black identity. Do you agree?
- Discuss the significance of the title of the poem.
- Study this poem in relation to Langston Hughes’ poem “*Dream deferred*”. Identify the similarities and dissimilarities in them.

### **Summative questions:**

- How successful has Brooks been in employing poetic techniques?
- “This poem is only a depiction of a personal experience” How far do you agree with this statement?
- Brooks has once said "I want to write poems that will be non-compromising. I don't want to stop a concern with words doing good jobs, which has always been a concern of mine, but I want to write poems that will be meaningful . . . things that will touch them." Discuss this in relation to this poem.
- Brooks has said “I know that the Black emphasis must be not *against white* but *FOR Black*. . . .” Discuss the poem in the light of this statement.

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## 4.8. Feast by Edna St. Vincent Millay

### 4.8.1 The Poet:

Edna St. Vincent Millay, born in 1892 in Maine, grew to become one of the premier twentieth-century lyric poets. She was also an accomplished playwright and speaker who often toured giving readings of her poetry.

Edna (who insisted on being called Vincent even entered writing contests under that name) and her sisters were encouraged in their literary and musical leanings by their mother. Millay's interests expanded to include theatre; she performed in numerous plays and wrote a Halloween play for her classmates to act out. Millay enjoyed her free-spirited childhood and adolescence and the creativity that it inspired.

At the age of twenty, she entered her poem "*Renascence*" into a poetry contest for the The Lyric Year, a contest with a 100 poems. It won fourth place and was published. It was that poem which really started her on her literary career, beginning with a scholarship to the then all-female college of Vassar. Millay kept up her writing, both poetic and dramatic while at Vassar. It was during this time that she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her book *The Harp-Weaver and other Poems*.

Millay's first book of poetry, *Renascence and Other Poems* was published in 1917 and well received. Then *A Few Figs from Thistles* was published in 1920 and sparked some attention as well as controversy with its feminist leanings.

After graduation Millay moved to Greenwich Village in New York, a particularly free-thinking and artistic borough where she kept up her writing.

Millay married Eugen Boissevain, who considerably older, predeceased her. He had managed her career and had been a great source of support. Millay died in 1950 at her home, Steepletop, in Austerlitz New York.

## **4.8.2 The Poem**

### **4.8.3 Title**

As the title 'Feast' suggests, the poem is about a grand meal that is being served, or which is going to take place. The title hints at some of the illusions the poet might use in her poem as well as alert the reader to the specific imagery the poet may use in the poem.

### **4.8.4 Form**

The poem comprises three stanzas of four lines each. Millay, though ranked among the modern American poets, was influenced by the traditional forms of poetry and uses lyrical as well as traditional forms to express her emotions, ideas and expressions. In Feast the poet uses each stanza to express a specific aspect of the overall idea that she is trying to bring forth in the poem.

### **4.8.5 Context/ Situation**

This poem is a reflection on life and its needs. The poem can be related to any context, because human nature is explicitly described through the poem. The want/need is always more important and more urgent than the satiation/ achievement of the need. Thus through 'Feast', Millay expresses her philosophy of life, that life goes on through the needs/cravings and wants we aspire for and achievement is less important than the drive towards the goal.

### **4.8.6 Images used**

Millay uses the well known images associated with a feast, wine and food. Through the use of classical overtones in the imagery the poet avoids the suggestion of a modern / contemporary feast

that the readers are associated with. The images of wine, roots and plants suggest an idyllic ancient feast that may have taken place in biblical times or in ancient times. But because of the evocation of this suggestive imagery and because of the timelessness of those images used, the poem carries a universal meaning.

#### **4.8.7. Analysis**

Edna St. Vincent Millay opens the poem as a first person narrative, 'I drank at every vine/ The last was like the first', thus expressing the common nature of all the beverages as a thirst quenching method. Thus from the first line itself, the poet is trying to open the reader's mind into accepting the commonality of certain events in life. The second line adds more weight to the first allusion. Her use of different words for vine (line 1) and wine (line 3) adds once again a general meaning to the idea of beverages. The wines are not only made of grapes as is widely known, but of all the vines. The homophones used strengthen the idea of the insignificance of the end results as compared to the need / want. 'I came upon no wine / So wonderful as thirst.'

In the second stanza, the poet continues the focus on the images associated with a lavish spread, as suggested by the title. Her desire to taste and test all the food available is expressed through 'every root', 'every plant'. But her satiation is overshadowed by her want, which was greater. Once again the play with rhythm and rhyme is continued.

The last stanza ties up her philosophical message with her images used in the poem. The poet declares that she is happy to 'lie down lean' with her hunger and her thirst while leaving all the vines and food to the 'vintner and monger', who will profit from these materialistic possessions. For the poet, experiencing the difference between need and want is more important than the mere satiation through materialistic fulfillment. The journey to attain / gain becomes important while the end result is insignificant compared to the want / need to attain the same. The poem was meant to be read aloud / sung to get its full meaning with homophones, rhythm and rhyme.

The poem can be appreciated at the level of an actual feast as well as human experience. The Feast can stand for life, and vine, wine, root, plant, fruit can be seen as different experiences that a human being goes through—the ultimate lesson for the human being /reader is the experience of contentment, a satiation of the self.

### **SBA suggestions**

- Collect TWO other poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay and present them to the class.

### **Questions**

- ‘There is a deeper meaning in the poem *Feast* than that of a person’s dissatisfaction with a feast’ Discuss with examples from the poem
- ‘I came upon no fruit / So wonderful as want’ Is this a universal truth? Discuss with relevant examples from the poem.

### **Reference**

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accessed on 11/04/10

## **4.9. Night of the Scorpion by *Nissim Ezekiel***

### **4.9.1. The Poet:**

Nissim Ezekiel (1924 – 2004) was born in Mumbai, India, to Jewish parents, who belonged to Mumbai's Jewish Community – "Bene Israel". He studied in Mumbai and London. After his return to India, and subsequent marriage to Daisy Jacob in 1952, his first collection of poetry "A Time to Change" was published by Fortune Press, London. This spawned a brilliant literary career, which included a novel, "The Unfinished Man"(1960); a book of drama – "The Three Plays" (1969) and eight volumes of poetry. He won the Akademi Award for his volume "Latter Day Psalms" and he was also a renowned art critic, lecturer and editor.

### **4.9.2. Analysis:**

In this poem Nissim Ezekiel recalls "the night" his "mother was stung by a scorpion". The poem is not really about the scorpion or its sting, but contrasts the reactions of family, neighbours and his father, with the mother's dignity and courage.

The poet begins by explaining how the scorpion, sheltering from the rain "beneath a sack of rice", stings his mother. An account of various superstitious reactions follows. The poet describes how the peasants "came like swarms of flies" and "buzzed the name of God", in their attempts to "paralyse the Evil One". This association of the scorpion with Evil, ties up to the poet's earlier reference to its "diabolic tail" and serves to underline the scorpion's demonic or Satan-like nature, attributed to it by the superstitious peasants. Ezekiel's use of the simile, comparing the villagers to 'swarms of flies' is striking, in that he uses an insect image to describe the neighbours' reaction to the incident. The fly simile suggests a lot about the poet's attitude to these neighbours and their reaction to his mother's suffering.

The peasants then attempt to find the scorpion (presumably to kill it) and are dismayed when they can't, particularly because of their superstitious belief that the creature's movements make the

poison move in its victims' blood. However, they also feel that this suffering will have a cleansing effect ("may the poison purify your flesh of desire and your spirit of ambition). The unmistakable irony in the line "the peace of understanding on each face" (How can they understand, when the suffering is borne by the poet's mother, alone?) also reveals how deeply rooted superstition and mythological belief was in the hearts and minds of these peasants.

The reaction of the poet's father also reveals his sheer desperation to heal his wife and relieve her of her suffering. The poet's father normally does not share the superstitions of the villagers (he is a "skeptic, rationalist"), but in this case his desperation makes him try "every curse and blessing". Even the Holy Man's attempts to "tame the poison with incantation" prove futile. Ultimately, time gives the only effective relief – "after twenty hours it lost its sting".

The conclusion of the poem is very poignant. We hear the mother's simple words (a sharp contrast to the voluble neighbors) – she doesn't show any bitterness about her ordeal: she is just grateful that she was the one who was hurt, instead of one her children (in which the case the consequences could have been fatal). Her concern is more immediate and practical and bears no relevance to "the sum of evil" or the "sum of good" in the world. Her sheer practicality stands as a powerful contrast to the superstitious beliefs of the villagers.

#### **4.9.3 Title:**

The title (reminiscent more of a horror film than a simple poem) is somewhat deceptive. It makes us believe that we are in for a frightening and dramatic tale with a scorpion taking centre stage. In fact, the poem is not about the scorpion at all, but about the reactions of different people to the scorpion's sting.

#### **4.9.4 Structure:**

The structure of the poem – the very long first section and the simple and brief second section – is very deliberate. It allows the poet to detail the frantic (albeit futile) reactions of the villagers, the

poet's father and the holy man to the scorpion's sting, and then contrast it with the understated and selfless courage of the poet's mother.

#### **4.9.5 Techniques:**

- Narrative Poem – Ezekiel employs a simple narrative structure. The poem begins in the first person, but switches to the third person as the poet reports what other people say and do.
- Simile – “the peasants came like swarms of flies and buzzed the name of God...”
- Imagery – “flash of diabolic tail in the dark room”, “lanterns throwing giant scorpion shadows on the sun-baked walls”
- Unrhymed lines of irregular length – run on lines (enjambment)
- The use of reported speech – particularly in Ezekiel's narration of the comments made by the villagers
- Alliteration – “parting with his poison”, “herb and hybrid”, “flame feeding”
- Repetition – in describing the villagers' prayers and incantations – “May...”, “they said”
- Contrast – between the poet's mother and the neighbours who have the “peace of understanding” on their faces while the mother “twisted through and through, groaning on a mat”

## **4.10. A Far Cry From Africa by Derek Walcott**

### **4.10.1 Poet:**

Poet and dramatist, Derek Walcott was born in 1930 in Saint Lucia, Windward Islands, West Indies. During much of his youth, Saint Lucia was a British colony and Walcott himself had both European and African roots – his grandfathers were white, while his grandmothers were African. Therefore, he understood the ‘typical’ post-colonial situation of being torn between a “native” African culture and a “learned” European one.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992 and currently teaches English Literature at the University of Boston

### **4.10.2 Genre: Post Colonial Poetry**

### **4.10.3 Background:**

Walcott bases his poem on the events of the Mau Mau Uprising, which took place in the 1950s in Kenya, a British colony at the time. The Kikuyu were the largest and most educated tribe in Kenya and held a significant place in society. However, as the British colonists took over more and more of their land, the Kikuyu were relegated to the position of poorly paid tenant farmers, leading to the formation of a resistance group named “Mau Mau” who aimed at driving the imperialists from their native land. All Kikuyu were not part of this movement, however. In fact, many remained neutral and some even supported the British in defeating the Mau Mau.

The 8-year uprising was extremely bloody and the Mau Mau meted out brutal treatment to the British, as well as to any “disloyal” Kikuyu. It is estimated that 2000 such Kikuyu were slaughtered, while approximately 13,000 Kenyans died in clashes with the British armies.

#### 4.10.4 Analysis:

In the first stanza the poet compares Africa to an animal (probably a lion) whose "tawny pelt" has been ruffled. This reference to the Mau Mau Uprising then gives way to graphic imagery of corpses strewn across the ground, and the brutality of both the Mau Mau /Kikuyu ("quick as flies/batten upon the bloodstream of the veldt") and the British ("Waste no compassion upon these separate dead"). Walcott compares the brutal massacre to the massacre of the Jews. He infers that the British think the Africans are as dispensable as Hitler thought the Jews to be. But he also highlights the culpability of the Mau Mau in the carnage ("...to the white child hacked in bed"), thus ensuring that his anti-colonialist ideas do not allow a justification of the kind of brutality unleashed by the Africans. As Heather M. Bradley ("Conflicting Loyalties in 'A Far Cry From Africa'") points out:

"Walcott depicts Africa and Britain in the standard roles of the vanquished and the conqueror, although he portrays the cruel imperialistic exploits of the British without creating sympathy for the African tribesmen. This objectivity allows Walcott to contemplate the faults of each culture without reverting to the bias created by attention to moral considerations."

In the second stanza, Walcott points out that violence in the animal kingdom is perfectly natural. However, he says that man fights against other men only to seek "divinity" and not as part of the natural order of things. Despite the fact that the conflict is bloody, the Kikuyu continue to fight because they fear the British rule after the conflict more than they fear death ("still that native dread/of the white peace contracted by the dead"). This verse too is rife with authentic African imagery, such as the reference to hunting in "Threshed out by beaters" and the oxymoronic "parched river or best-teeming plain".

In the third stanza, the poem turns to Walcott's personal inner conflict over the war. Walcott is of mixed heritage (“I who am poisoned with the blood of both”) and he cannot resolve the inner conflict between his hatred of colonialism and his love of England (“how choose / between this Africa and the English tongue I love?”). This line identifies the things that the poet most admires about each culture and he openly acknowledges that he is sympathetic to the African cause but at the same time, he still feels ties to England. He questions if he should give them both up. Finally, in the last line, he questions if he could, in good conscience, turn from Africa and continue to live. The poet’s search for identity is further complicated and remains unresolved at the end of the poem.

The events related in the poem seem to magnify an inner conflict in the poet about his own mixed heritage and leads to conflicting loyalties within him. Just as the poet is divided into two over the issue of where his sympathies should lie, the poem too is roughly divided into two – the first half detailing the events and atrocities of the uprising, and the second half detailing the inner conflict within the poet’s mind about his heritage.

The title of the poem reflects the poet’s state of mind in conflict. It “emphasizes Walcott's cultural instability as it implies a type of alienation from Africa, despite its concentration on African themes” (Bradley). The title suggests that the “cry” from Africa is a great distance away (“far”), thus underlining the metaphorical distance and alienation of the poet from his African roots. It also suggests that the cries of pain and anguish that are issuing from the land and its people in the backdrop of the Mau Mau uprising is “a far cry” from the paradise-like Africa that the poet has imagined.

#### **4.10.5 Themes:**

- A search for identity – being torn between two cultures, conflicting loyalties
- Violence and cruelty – the long drawn out cruelty of the colonizer and the short-term brutality of the insurrection

#### **References:**

- **nobelprize.org/nobel\_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/index.html**. Accessed 23, August 2009.
- Bradley, Heather M. "Conflicting Loyalties in 'A Far Cry from Africa'". Literature of the Caribbean. The Scholarly Technology Group, Washington and Lee University. <http://landow.stg.brown.edu/post/caribbean/walcott/bradley2.html>>. Accessed on 19th July 2009 at 9.14 p.m.

## **4.11. Grandmother by Sitakant Mahapatra**

### **4.11.1. The Poet:**

Sitakant Mahapatra, born on September 17, 1937, is an acclaimed Oriya poet and critic at his best in portraying the culture of Orissan tradition. His is one of the best-known names in Indian Literature today. The people of Orissa appear in his poetry as a compassionate, simple, and innocent community.

He has held many prestigious positions as an administrator in India, has won many accolades for his work in the country as well as outside. He has also won many prestigious awards both literary and academic.

Writing in his native tongue as well as in English, his work covers several modes—poetry, essay, travelogue, e.g. Ashtapadi, 1963, Shabdara Akasha, 1971, Ara drushya, 1981, Shrestha kavita, 1994, (all poetry), Sabda, Svapna O nirvikata, 1990 (essays), Aneka sarata, 1981(travelogue); Ushavilasa, 1996 (palm leaf manuscript); In English: The ruined Temple and other poems, 1996 (poetry, translation); and Unending Rhythms (Oral poetry of Indian Tribals in translation).

### **4.11.2 The Poem**

#### **4.11.3 Title**

As the title suggests, ‘Grandmother’ is a poem about a relative. Since the title does not bear any possessive pronoun or an in/definite article, the reader is led to believe that the poem is about a grandmother that can be universally related to though as the poem unfolds we see that the reference is to his own grandmother and her death.

#### **4.11.4 Form**

The poem is written in free verse, arranged in seven segments. The segments are divided according to the different emotions and different aspects the poet brings out and explores. Written in a modern narrative style, the poem is a monologue as well as a narrative of the incidents that have taken place.

#### **4.11.5 Context/ Situation**

The poem is written about the narrator's grandmother's death. The narrator/ poet comes with his family to attend the funeral which is in a rural setting, but most of the needful arrangements have been done by then. The feelings evoked by grandmother's death are explored through the poem. The poet is careful not to reveal his emotions through the poem, and merely comments on the death and comments on it as a philosophical onlooker. The lack of personal emotions in the poem makes it a common experience to all the readers as well as brings out the deeper emotions that people are unable to express when in grief.

#### **4.11.6 Images used**

Mahapatra uses a lot of local imagery when presenting the poem. His Asian, specifically Oriya heritage is brought out through the imagery used. The grandmother is never physically described, but the dialogue used evokes a picture of an old traditional grandmother. The funeral rites, though not described, are hinted at through the references to pallbearers and Neem. The leaf 'neem-bitter' flavours the traditional funeral meal. Though the specific location or the specific region is never mentioned in the poem, Mahapatra uses very South Asian images which stir the South Asian readers' collective conscience. The star-filled sky, crickets' singing as well as glow worms bring out the memories of rural life that people associate with their grandparents and thus the reader once again relates to an individual experience through a common description. Mahapatra's larger than life gestures such as 'the sky where/ she had become another star' reminds the reader of

childhood fantasies about stars being your dead loved ones. Thus the poet's use of imagery while being simple and poignant is capable of bringing up memories that are uniquely South Asian.

#### **4.11.7 Analysis**

'She used to say: Even the God of Death / reaches our village struggling and late' Mahapatra sums up the tiring journey to the grandmother's house thus with grandmother's own comment. The buses that go there are crowded, with 'stick thin' people, the trail to grandmother's house is any youngster's adventure, with many river crossings, and paths between crop fields, strewn with dead snails and crabs. The rural setting of the grandmother's village is thus suggested, with economy of words and images. The journey would have been pleasurable at any time, except that they wanted to reach the house as fast as they could. But the grandmother of course has always known this; even the God of Death reaches the village late. The simple philosophy and acceptance of the older generation is brought out through that simple comment.

The second stanza details the simple life the grandmother must have led. Her second longest journey is the one she makes after her death. The first was her marriage. The young, blushing, tamarind coloured bride who journeyed into the faraway house to make it her own is leaving the house she made for herself, now, as a dead corpse. The Hindu ideologies of a woman's place being the man's house after her marriage as well as the traditional setup of the rural villages where women rarely traveled is thus illustrated. But her son, who is hinted as being a city dweller who lives far away has come too late, because the 'pallbearers had arranged everything'. Through that simple line Mahapatra illustrates the results of modernization and urbanization on the older generation, such as the grandmother.

The third stanza brings out the feelings of the grandmother and her final request from her son. She wants him to come and see her, even though she knows that she has become 'an eroded

shore', which is crumbling away gradually. The metaphor of a tree at a floodwater's edge clearly brings out the wasting away of life as well as the importance the grandmother has had in her son's life. She is now slipping away with the current of time, without noise and sound. The acceptance and the philosophical nature of the older generation despite their lack of exposure is thus clearly portrayed.

'As vast as the sky, dumb as the earth' the grandmother symbolizes knowledge as well as rural ignorance. She is more knowledgeable than most of the urbanized because of her wisdom but she is dumb too, not in a derogatory sense but in a profound way, she is like the earth. The specific Asian imagery such as the earth and the sky are brought in to show the profound, deep wisdom of the grandmother.

The images of the cowdung washed walls and the funeral meal of Neem are very culture specific. Mahapatra uses his own Oriya traditions in the aftermath of the funeral. The father weeps with his back to the family, because the Asian tradition demands that the father has to be a strong person. The narrator is amazed at the weeping because it is the first time he had seen his father weep. The shock, the helplessness and the embarrassment such a weeping brings out in a child is evident in the line 'What could I have said to console him?' The narrator walks out to find solace in the stars, another childhood memory all the readers can relate to is thus brought out. The grandmother has become a star and the narrator seeks solace in that fact by gazing at the stars. Mahapatra's use of traditional, folkloric images, even though larger than life size is closer to the readers because of their rural flavour as well as their simplistic nature.

The final stanza reveals the poet/ narrator's philosophical view of life and its sad moments such as death. The narrator /poet controls his innermost feelings throughout the poem except in this final stanza, where he declares that 'every weeping act in this life is performed in a hidden way, secretly'. The emotions are not expressed, the non-expression of deep emotions itself signifies the strength of the emotions the narrator/poet may have felt at the death of the grandmother.

Mahapatra uses the poem not simply as a narrative of a grandmother's death, but also as a record of the impact of urbanization on rural community as well as a philosophical comment on life and its sorrows. The rural Asian acceptance of sorrow as well as the void a grandmother's death can leave in a grandchild's life too are very subtly brought out through the poem.

### **SBA suggestions**

- Relate any unforgettable experience you have had with your grandparents to the class.

### **Questions**

- 'Mahapatra's poem *Grandmother* is a deep analysis of human psychology and the acceptance and bearing of sorrow' Do you agree? Discuss.

### **Reference**

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitakant\\_Mahapatra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitakant_Mahapatra) accessed on 12/04/10
- <http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/sitakantmahapatra.html> accessed on 12/04/10

## 4.12. The Poet by Lakdasa Wikkramasinha

### 4.12.1 The poet

Lakdasa Wikkramasinha was born in 1941 in Menikhinne, Kandy. He was educated at St Thomas' Mount Lavinia, and studied law thereafter. He gave up his studies after three years and taught English as an Instructor at the University of Kelaniya. He married in 1974. In 1978, at the age of thirty seven, he drowned while swimming in the sea at Mount Lavinia.

He has written six volumes of poetry: *Lustre Poems* (1965), *Fifteen Poems* (1970), *Nossa Senhora Dos Chingalas* (1973), *O Regal Blood* (1975), and *The Grasshopper Gleaming* (1976).

Wikkramasinha is considered one of the first Sri Lankan writers who was able to “fuse Sinhala and English into a genuinely creative alternative discourse, as he was more firmly grounded in the native literary and cultural traditions” (Suresh Canagarajah, 1994)

He was a fluent bilingual and also wrote poetry in Sinhala, although these works are considered inferior to his writing in English. He famously described his struggle to come to terms with the fact that he's writing in English, the coloniser's tongue in the introduction to *Lustre Poems*:

"I have come to realize that I am using the language of the most despicable and loathsome people on earth; I have no wish to extend its life and range, or enrich its tonality. To write in English is a form of cultural treason. I have had for the future to think of a way of circumventing this treason; I propose to do this by making my writing entirely immoralist and destructive."

However, despite this early proclamation, most critics agree that he has actually been constructive, particularly, as Yasmine Gooneratne says, “because his poetry has done a good deal to build a tradition where none existed before.” (1979, p. 6)

#### 4.12.2 The poem

“The Poet” can be considered a revolutionary poem.

The traditional role of the poet is to respond in verse to what happens in society, but here, the poet completely overturns this view in his depiction of a poet in this poem. Wikkramasinha describes the poet using metaphors from guerrilla or terrorist activity, and a time bomb rather than merely confining himself to “taking notes” on the actions of others.

In this poem the poet advocates a far more active, even a violent role for the poet. In the scenes described in the poem, the metaphors for the role of the poet are those of an assassin and a guerrilla.

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet launches a grenade attack, after which the poet takes down notes. Through this portrayal, Wikkramasinha shows that the poet is in the thick of things, and not a mere commentator or a bystander. His involvement is not just limited to ideological support, but one of active participation.

The poem describes two such active roles played by the poet. First, it is that of an assassin who hides and waits with a rifle with powerful telescopic sights to assassinate a dignitary, probably a politician or a statesman driven in a car, who is identified as “the enemy”. Next, it is that of a guerrilla preparing an ambush in the jungle, and who prepares a booby trap, then crouches among the grass waiting, possibly, for enemy soldiers. Finally, the poet is compared with a time bomb, where his uncontrollable feelings are compared to the powerful explosive.

There are several settings suggested in the poem. “The crowd” in line 2 suggests a busy public place in a town. The next setting suggests a public meeting that a dignitary is expected to attend. The setting of the ambush is clearly a jungle, but in the final verse, the reference to “the bomb in

the city” shows that the setting changes again to an urban one as in the first verse. The different settings suggest the different locations of activity for the poet.

### 4.12.3. Themes

The theme(s) in this poem are conveyed indirectly. The poem is open to several interpretations.

Some of the messages conveyed by Wikkramasinha appear to be:

- The definition of the poet is – or should be – one of active participation, and even violence. A poet should create the changes, even use violence to create political unrest
- Revolutionary poets should be active revolutionaries. Poets, rather than being revered and honoured, are dangerous in their passion, as their uncontrollable emotion can burst forth in violence (last verse). Such strong emotions are not limited to its expression on paper, but form a part of the active engagement and even the destruction necessary for revolution.
- The passion and the conviction the poet feels against unfairness and social injustice should be put into action.
- Overall, the poem appears to question the conventional role of the poet as being an observer and an interpreter of social events through his poetic commentary. Instead, the poem appears to advocate an active participation and initiation of action by the poet, thereby revolutionizing the role and the responsibility of the poet.
- At the same time, the poem also cautions that the passion of the poet can also be self-destructive.

### 4.12.4 Poetic devices

#### **Repetition:**

The repetition of *The poet* and *he is the one* to emphasise the redefined role of the poet advocated by Wikkramasinha.

## **Suspense**

There is much suspense in the poem which is created in the entire poem through the references to waiting, watching, the ticking of clocks, the time passing (seconds of his heart), of watching and waiting for an enemy.

## **Antithesis:**

The last phrase of the lines “he is the one that, tossing a bomb into the crowd, *takes notes*”: Here, taking notes is an unexpected, as it is the opposite of what we’d expect to follow the act of throwing a bomb into a crowd.

## **Inversions:**

Many word order changes in the poem. Ex:

“The one who, from an unseen distance

levels on the tripod that black rifle”

“Waits.... for the onset of the car / in the left corner of its back seat”

## **Run on line:**

Another feature of free verse, and a conversational poetic style. Each verse contains a single sentence.

## **Metaphor:**

In the final verse, the poet’s heart is compared with a time bomb, or a hand grenade.

“The poet is the bomb in the city,

Unable to bear the circle of the

Seconds in his heart”

### 4.12.5. Language

Direct, unadorned language, describing events and individuals very simply and minimally.

However the poem is syntactically complex as there is much subordination in the syntactic constructions of the lines, using long, complex sentences with **run on line**.

### Questions

1. What does the poet mean when he says that the black rifle has “sights that see as far as his soul”?
2. What is your expectation of the role of the poet? Discuss this in groups before you read the poem.
3. “The poet should be an active revolutionary, not a mere social critic.” Do you agree?

### 4.12.6 Glossary

Trains – points a gun at the target (v)

ambush – lying hidden in order to attack unexpectedly

onset – beginning, or an assault

spiked pit – a reference to a type of booby trap where sharpened bamboo sticks were placed inside concealed pits to impale those who fall in

## **SBAs**

1. Find other poems outside the syllabus that are considered poems of social commentary. What is the role of the poet that is suggested in them? How different is this role from that which is defined by Wikkramasinha in this poem?
2. Do you agree with poets taking active part in revolution – i.e. turning violent? Organise and take part in a class debate based on opposing answers to this question.
3. Research and write an essay on real poets who have taken active part in wars and revolutions.

## **References**

- Canagarajah, A. Suresh. (1994). Competing Discourses in Sri Lankan English Poetry. *World Englishes* Vol. 13. No. 3. pp 361-376.
- Gooneratne, Yasmine. 1979. Introduction to *Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore*. Hongkong: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia). pp 1-8.

## 4.13. Birds Beasts and Relatives by Richard de Zoysa

### 4.13.1 The Poet

Richard de Zoysa was born on 13 March 1958. He died on 19 February 1990 at the age of 32. Born into the westernised, educated elite of Colombo, he came from two illustrious families. His father was a Sinhalese and his mother a Tamil. His father, Lucien de Zoysa was prominent on the English language stage, and his mother, Manoranee Saravanamuttu, who also acted, was a doctor. Richard was educated at St Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia, where he was described as "a precocious and brilliant" schoolboy, and where he excelled in drama.

When his parents separated he spent some time with his mother in Liberia, but came back to Sri Lanka to finish schooling. Having got through his Advanced Levels while working, he was finally completing an external degree at the time of his death.

During his brief life, he was a well known personality of outstanding talent. He was a gifted actor and a director of plays. He took part in many English language plays in Colombo in the 1980s, and he also played a lead role in the Sinhala film based on Martin Wickramasingha's *Yuganthaya*. He was a teacher at St Thomas' from 1981-1983, where he taught English literature.

He was also a journalist and a theatre critic, and was one of the first English newscasters on the Rupavahini channel. He did a lot of freelance media work, including for the Ministry of Defence in the 1980s. In 1988 he joined Inter Press Service, a third world news agency. His success here led IPS to offer him an editor's post in the agency's European headquarters in Lisbon, Portugal, in early 1990.

Just before he left however, he was abducted by unidentified armed men from his flat in Welikadawatte, Rajagiriya on 18 February 1990. His body was found the next day on the beach in Moratuwa. It is believed that he was shot and killed a few hours after he was taken away.

After his death, his mother became an activist and founder of the Centre for Family Services, an organization she set up to help the mothers and wives of disappeared men during the 1988-1990 violence. The Inter Press Service, his employer, renamed the IPS Award for Excellence in Independent Journalism in his name to commemorate his life.

His poetry was a little known aspect of his life. In most accounts of his life, the fact that he wrote poetry is hardly mentioned. However, a volume of his poetry, entitled *This Other Eden*, was published posthumously in 1990 by the English Association of Sri Lanka. It was edited by Rajiva Wijesinha, who had initially published Richard's poetry in *The New Lankan Review*.

Much of Richard de Zoysa's poetry has a political and social consciousness that reflected the turbulent times of the late 1980s. He also wrote intensely personal love poems. A notable quality in his poetry is his control of form – he wrote free verse as well as rhyming quatrains with equal ease – and his control of language, with his use of Sri Lankan idiom and Standard English diction.

*The last time I saw Richard*, a radio documentary drama based on the testimonies of his friends was aired on 28 November 2008 on BBC Radio 4. It was directed by William Scott Richards, and inspired by *The Limits of Love*, a novel by Rajiva Wijesinha.

“Birds, Beasts and Relatives” was written after one of the several visits to Yala Richard made with Rajiva and his family.

**4.13.2      Genre**      political satire

**4.13.3      Form**      four-line quatrains of iambic pentametres, rhyming aabb,  
resembling a ballad

**4.13.4      Background to the poem**

The poem was written in 198? as a comment on the growing political violence in the country. It is one of De Zoysa's many political poems.

#### **4.13.5 Comment on the poem**

The poem is primarily a political satire, using animal imagery which is frequently found in De Zoysa's poetry (for example see "Lepidoptera", "Animal Crackers" and "Gajagavannama").

The initial setting of the poem is a concrete one, a wildlife park, which remains unnamed. The poet writes in the persona of a visitor to the wildlife park who sees rare sights of several species of wildlife, such as three leopards, a bear, and four herds of elephants.

There is also a reference to the fact that the poet is visiting the park after a long time in the second verse.

The poet's initial comments on his visit show that he is not very excited by the sightings, which is an unusual reaction in a wildlife enthusiast in a jungle. This absence of enthusiasm is also clear in the preceding verses where he refers to all the creatures he saw in very bland terms, without any of the adjectives or exclamations that we would expect in such an account.

The poem goes on to draw parallels between animals in the wildlife park and man. According to the poet, Man also performs all the basic, animal-like functions associated with the wildlife, such as killing its prey, sloughing skin, and returning to its own faeces.

Here the poet points out that man is much better ("adept") at most of these animal functions than the wild animals themselves.

The safari highlights modern man's distance from wildlife and the jungle, as man observes, appreciates and comments on jungle creatures from afar. However, the poet shows that this 'distance' is only a physical one, and bridges it in the poem by comparing wildlife with man

The poet avoids naming places or people in the poem. This indirectness is perhaps a result of the extreme censorship that existed at the time. It also makes the poem universal.

As in many others of De Zoysa's poems, this poem also displays the poet's mastery over language and form.

#### **4.13.6 Themes**

The sociopolitical theme is presented indirectly, a generic term 'man' is used so as not to identify who the real subjects are.

- The universal theme of Abuse of power and the violence that results
- the instinctive and inherent violence in man which brings him close to wild animals
- chauvinism – the irrational bigotry and prejudice in man -- makes him worse than animals.

#### **4.13.7 Language and poetic devices**

**Animal imagery** The use of animal imagery to describe human characteristics is echoes of the technique used in ancient beast tales, or bestiaries, which describe animals with human, or even supernatural qualities (the wily fox, the innocent deer, for example). Here, the poet extends this technique by using animal characteristics of a more general nature to suggest the negative traits of man.

**Metonymy?** Although metonymy traditionally refers to the use of a physical object to embody a more general idea (such as "the crown" to refer to royalty) the poet's use of the term "man" can be called metonymic as it is a reference to those involved in political violence and abuse of power during the time that he wrote the poem.

**Irony:** The use of irony, as seen in neoclassical satire, is widespread in this poem. The tone of the entire poem is ironic, with a sense of false celebration in the final verses. The poet's references to Man are tongue in cheek, sarcastic and humorous examples of irony. Ex: "a

splendid predatory beast”, “a fine hereditary chauvinistic sense of smell”, “man’s adept at camouflage”.

**Wit:** There is clever use of language by twisting idioms to convey new meaning: “Man, quite unlike other beasts, in lots/of instances can change his spots” and by using **puns** “creative use of light and shade/ to hide forbidden private parts” (‘private parts’ usually refer to genitals, but here it is used to suggest political violence or anti-social behaviour).

**Comparisons** are made and **Parallels** are drawn between the wild animals and the jungle with Man and Society.

The poet identifies several points of comparison between Man and Wildlife: both ‘return to their own faeces’, both kill, both are good at camouflage and at staying hidden in the forest, both have a keen sense of smell, keen eyesight, both moult and slough skin, both can change appearances or allegiances (‘can change his spots’). The poet extends these comparisons creatively to convey the message of Man’s violence and chauvinism. The comparisons work at an indirect, metaphorical level.

**Rhythm:** the poem has the rhyme scheme and the rhythm of a popular ballad, specifically a satirical ballad. The poem also echoes the rhythm as well as the use of innuendo that is often seen in satirical “viridu” kavi.

## **Activities**

1. Write the meaning of the following lines and expressions in your own words:

“The passing years have left their mark”

“The spotted hunter fails to thrill”

“doom the quarry to the chase”

“man’s adept at camouflage”

“cry out for blood”

“The best quarry for mankind is Man”

2. Many positive adjectives such as “splendid” and “fine” are used ironically in this poem. Make a list of them. Find their meanings in the dictionary first, and then try to describe what the poet intends them to mean in his poem.

3. Describe what you think the poet suggests in the phrases below:

“[man] returns to his own faeces”

“man’s a splendid predatory beast”

“[man] can tell the subtle shades of class and race

“[man has a] fine hereditary chauvinistic sense of smell”

“man’s adept at camouflage”

“[man] can change his spots”

4. Now write an essay discussing the animal attributes that are reflected in modern man, as suggested in this poem. Use the answers from questions 1, 2 and 3 to illustrate your points.

### **SBA:**

1. Often in folk tales animals are given human qualities. Read at least five of these tales from different cultures and make a presentation on what qualities are brought out through these animals.
2. In groups, enact a short political skit on the themes of “a leopard cannot change his spots” or “the best quarry for mankind is man”

### **References**

Wijesinha, Rajiva. (1990). Introduction. In *This Other Eden: The Collected Poems of Richard de Zoysa*. Colombo: The English Association of Sri Lanka. Pp 1-6.

## **4.14. At What Dark Point by Anne Ranasinghe**

### **4.14.1 The Poet (Poetess)**

Anne Ranasinghe was born Anneliese Katz, in Essen, Germany in 1925 to a Jewish family. At the age of thirteen, she fled Germany, before the holocaust. To quote the poet, “I was just thirteen years old at the time of the so called Night of the Broken Glass and witnessed the burning down of our beautiful synagogue, was present when my father was transported to Dachau (concentration camp) and at his agonizing return – a physical and mental wreck. In January 1939 I left Germany by train via Venlo and Flusing, crossed a stormy winter channel by boat to the British port of Harwich and finally arrived alone, a tall rather ungainly girl- at Liverpool station in London, where an aunt I had never seen before was waiting for me” Anne was educated in England. She was uprooted from her German heritage- its language and its culture. Subsequently, she trained as a nurse. She met Prof. Ranasinghe of Sri Lanka and married him. She has lived in her adopted country ever since. She began writing in the late sixties. Her first collection of poems- was published in 1971.

### **4.14.2 Genre**

Modern poetry or even post-colonial poetry as the poem deals with issues like violence against the ‘other’, authoritarianism and the denial of the right to life.

Located in Sri Lanka during a period of violence, it also shows features of ‘Sri Lankan Poetry’, in its setting and atmosphere. Presented as free verse, it has elements of narrative poetry (arranged in lines of uneven length and stanzas of varying sizes and focused more on meaning rather than form) seemingly a vehicle for an incident, it is deeply reflective. It reads like an internal monologue.

Anne has written twelve books of poems and short stories. Some of them are,

1. Against Eternity and Darkness (1985)
2. At What Dark Point (1991)
3. Not Even Shadows (1991)
4. Desire and Other Stories (1994)
5. Mascot and Symbol (1997)
6. With Words We Write our Lives

### **a. The Poem**

Rajiva Wijesinghe (1995) describes this poem “as one of the most evocative of the Holocaust poems”, published in her collection of that name (1991). It begins with the image of a man:

‘sitting in the speckled shade of my blossom laden araliya tree which I planted many years ago in my garden, and the branches now have spread into our lane, set in a background, lush and rich, almost a romantic setting. Then the verse moves into a somber almost sinister context. This context is suggested within the romantic setting itself in phrases like ‘skeletal hands’, “twisting, twisting”.

The seemingly insignificant, everyday, familiar event develops into the macabre- “skeletal hands” “makes a rope that grows, and grows”. It is as ‘if’ the mechanical routine action has been suddenly transformed, galvanized into evil, without the volition of the doer. Innocence and beauty in life is juxtaposed with the sinister and evil. It is as if evil, dormant, suddenly springs from the safe, from the familiar. This is Anne’s experience- her known world, with people she knew and trusted which was suddenly metamorphosed into an unbelievably horrible world of bestiality. Her memory of the holocaust triggers off with every sensory experience. The present evokes the past and is inviolate in her

consciousness. Hence, the seemingly mechanical (innocent) action of the man (who has manifested from nowhere) is potent with future evil – “to a future purpose of evilness”. In the man’s actions are the wellsprings of future actions which are inextricably connected to her past. “I sense the charred – wood smell again” (the burning down of the beautiful synagogue – the violence on Jewish culture and identity). The complex metaphor simultaneously visual and auditory (charred wood smell/ stained glass exploding in the flames!) is a signal of the horror to come- the hunting of the prey, who run with animal fear’ and the hunter “stalks with the lust for blood”. Humanity is reduced to beasts and there is no possibility of love or reason.

The most primeval instincts are released and the hunters’ appetite is whetted by blood- Anne conveys the ‘raw terror’ released by the holocaust in the lives of the terrorized. She extends her experience by foregrounding her memory, to the human contexts. The instinct to kill, to revert to bestiality is latent in every human being. In human life, in social contexts:

‘that nothing is impossible  
that anything is possible  
that there is no safety  
in words or houses.’

The irony with which this generalization is made conveys a deep seated pessimism. Neither the technological achievements nor the cultural artefacts nor abstract philosophy that human civilization have created are safeguards for the primeval instincts that is the nature of man. Deeply ingrained in man is the potential nay inclination for violence. The instinct, to kill the ‘other’ is such a driving force so that;

‘and no one knows

at what dark point the time will come again

blood and knives, terror and pain

of jackboots and the twisted strand of rope.’

The metaphors related to blood and violence signify the dark side of man “dark point”. The world itself is pregnant with evil. The cycle of evil is endemic. The hunter and the hunted are both human. There is a strong sense of genocide:

scratched death mark on an oven wall is my child’s hand.

She strikes a personal note here and it heightens the intensity. The children subjected to mass murder in German gas chambers were Jews, they are Anne’s people. The personalization, seeing herself or the gassed child, who in agony had placed her hand on the oven wall accentuates the horror and suffering. But it does more. It makes the dead child, a symbol of all children, subjected to the horror of unmitigated hatred and horror. It universalizes the experience. A poem which began as an intensely personal one, transcends acute personal grief and anger to become a philosophical reflection on the human condition. It does not mean that there is reconciliation to reality- rather a pessimistic commentary on human nature.

#### 4.14.3 Techniques

- (a) Range of metaphors both direct and implied. Eg: shadow of silence, fractured glass, stalking with the lust for blood, ironed heel, edge of silence.

Mixed metaphors : jackboot ringing hard and clear.

- (b) Symbolism -poems, music, philosophy, houses or temples, dark point, blood and knives.

- (c) Image chains – golden- haze brightness, white- velvet fragrance, charred wood smell, cold- winter- taste. charred- wood- midnight fear.

Anne Ranasinghe is a conscious artist. These strings of words create complex images which combine a number of senses.

#### 4.14.4 Study Questions

- (a) ‘Anne’s Holocaust experience is ever present in her sub-conscious. Every experience throws it up to her conscious mind’.

Discuss.

- (b)“Anne’s attitude to life is essentially pessimistic”. Discuss this statement in relation to the poem.

### 1.3 References

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## PART II

# The Essay

## Introduction

Let us begin by asking ourselves some questions

1. What type of essays have your students written?
2. What type of essays do they like to write?
3. What kind of difficulties do your students face when writing essays?
4. What guidance do you give students to write the essay?

Generally, as teachers, we can answer questions 1 and 3 fairly easily. We might find 2 a bit more difficult to answer. But to most of us, Question 4 will probably be the most difficult one. This is because of the nature of the essay writing classroom not only in our country, but in most parts of the world. In general, the essay writing class is characterized the following

.....  
.....

- Essay writing is mostly untaught, we are often at a loss as to how to teach essay writing skills
- We focus on the finished essay, but students need guidance with the process, on early drafts, on both content and language use
- The teacher's role in essay writing has been that of an examiner/evaluator, not a teacher of essay writing skills.
- Essay writing is not given much classroom time, many difficult steps of essay writing are undertaken by the student alone, out of the classroom
- Model essays are often misused: they should be used to learn how language is used, and how information is presented and organised. Instead, students are often made to memorise and reproduce them. This naturally does not develop any writing skills.

## **The process of writing essays**

There are several significant steps that are followed in the process of writing an essay:

**Step 1. Preparation:** At this stage, students engage in pre-writing activities, or prepare to write the essay. This stage includes everything that is done to plan writing the essay. Students will think about the topic, brainstorm points, read up on the topic to find information, discuss the topic with others, select, prioritise and group information, and finally create an outline of the essay.

**Step 2. Drafting:** At this stage, students begin writing the essay. This will be the first draft of the essay. Here students focus on the content of the essay based on the outline that was developed in the first stage. The first draft will therefore contain all the content that a student wants to present in his essay: the ideas, the opinions and the information. At this stage, the students will not be thinking of writing neatly but will concentrate on putting down all their ideas on the paper, as coherently as possible, based on the plan of the essay that we prepared in Step 1. So there may be errors -- grammar, vocabulary and expression, spelling. It is also possible, while writing the draft, that the student will not keep strictly to the outline they made in Step 1. New ideas often come into the writer's head during the act of writing. When this happens, the organisation might also change.

**Step 3. Revising:** After a draft is written, it is read again and rewritten, improving the expression and revising the content. Some points may be fleshed out, while others may be condensed or even left out. Grammar errors as well as errors of vocabulary, expression and punctuation will be corrected at this stage. Some parts may be entirely rewritten, or the writer might change the order of sentences or paragraphs in order to improve the organisation. Students may revise their essays more than once depending on how much time there is. Even two or three drafts may be written before the student or the teacher is satisfied with it. On the other hand, if students are writing timed essays at the examination, there will not be any time to redraft it. At the exam, students generally move from Step 2 to Step 4, and there will be very few changes made to the first draft.

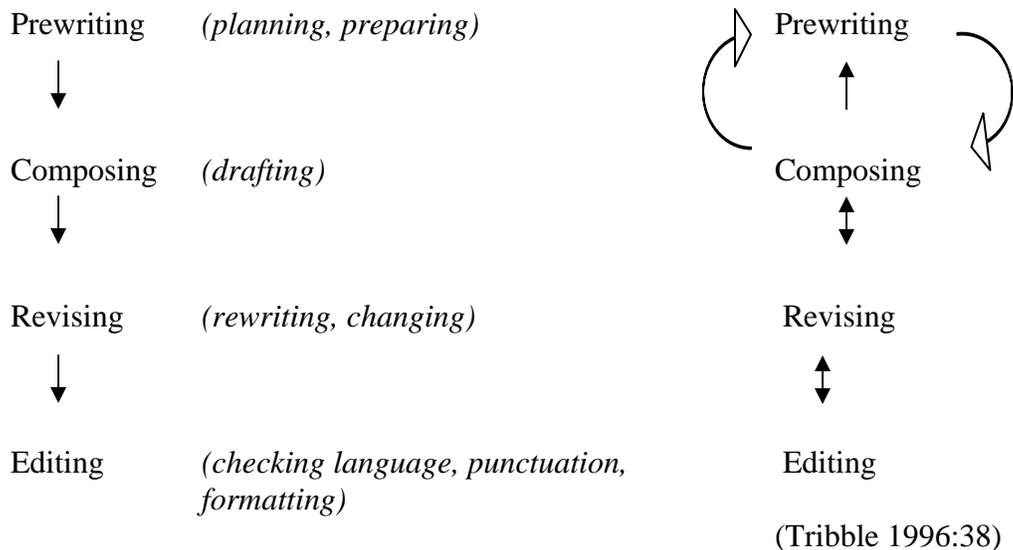
**Step 4. Editing.** This is the final stage of the essay writing process. This is what students should do before handing in their essay – give it a final check for language, correct the spelling, any grammar errors, and the mechanics of presentation like handwriting, margins and spacing. Here too, if there are many changes to be made, and if time allows it, a student might decide to write a new draft. This will be the final draft of the essay, which the student will hand in to the teacher for marking.

### **Looking beyond the four steps**

In the four steps described above, traditionally the teacher plays only a minimal role. Most of the activities described in the steps are done outside the classroom. The teacher will usually assign the topic, and the students will plan and write the essay at home. The teacher might inform the students on what is expected in the essay in terms of main points. The teacher might also give a breakdown of how the essay will be marked after it is submitted, and some basic rules such as how long it should be, and the general format of the essay.

The students usually follow these steps on their own, and often with very little guidance and support of the teacher. It is also clear, though not always stated, that following these steps is by no means an easy thing to do, particularly in English, a second language to most of our students.

We also tend to look at the process of writing as if these steps are taken in a neat, orderly fashion, moving from one step to the other. This is also assumed in textbooks and guidebooks on writing. However, the reality can be very different. As Tribble (1996, p. 38) points out, the process of writing does not happen in linear steps, but is a cyclic, recursive and a complex process, where the writer might begin at begin or end at a middle step, often revisiting steps already taken.



More recent developments in teaching essay writing skills, however, have attempted to address these issues.

### **The Teacher's role in the essay writing class**

In the traditional essay writing classroom, the teacher only plays the role of an evaluator and an examiner. However, more recently, the teacher's role in the essay writing classroom has been redefined. This is a result of experts acknowledging the importance of the process of writing, and the need to make the essay writing less isolating and fearsome to the student:

**Audience** - responds like a genuinely interested reader [to the content of the essay], not like a judge or an examiner who only notices the errors

**Assistant** - assists students to improve the text [by helping them with language use, content, organisation, in the process of writing the essay]

**Evaluator** - makes comments to encourage students, without vagueness [gives comments on content and on language use, on relevance, on how better to present a point, words criticism like suggestions]

**Examiner** - says whether the text has passed, or failed to make the grade

(Tribble 1997: 121)

### **Activities for the essay writing classroom**

There are activities to assist the students to follow all the steps in the process of writing an essay. Most of them are designed to make the process of writing less mysterious and isolating for the student, and to bring the steps in the process into the classroom, so that they could be done with the support of the teacher. These activities take into account the process of writing, as well as the redefined role of the teacher as that of a guide, an interested reader and a facilitator. Some of these activities are:

1. Brainstorming
2. Developing an outline
3. Freewriting
4. Writing multiple drafts
5. Developing paragraphs
6. Group writing activities
7. Reformulation
8. Conferencing
9. Reading for writing.

## **Brainstorming**

This is useful in the process of writing, at the prewriting or the planning stage of the essay. Brainstorming ideas for an essay can be done by the students in groups, or the whole class can engage in it with the teacher. Here, the teacher should encourage students to say anything they like about the topic, and write it down on the blackboard without comment or correction. This will encourage more students to speak. After you have got enough ideas down, you can start **selecting, grouping and ordering** the points. This should also be done with the involvement of the class, by asking the students questions such as “what are the most relevant points here?” “What points can we leave out?” “With what points can we start writing the essay?”

## **Developing an outline**

Writing an outline, ie the essay in point form, can also be done in class, in groups. This can be an activity in itself. Students can get into groups of five and develop and outline for an essay in class. If this is done on a large sheet of paper that can be pinned on the wall, students can read them all, and with the teacher’s help, identify the good and bad points in each outline, and select the best one. Developing an outline is usually done by students in isolation, activities such as this gains them the teacher’s assistance to develop this skill.

## **Free writing**

In order to create the mood for writing, free writing activities may be done as icebreakers in the writing class. Free writing also addressed the fear of writing especially among the less proficient students. The teacher may give a prompt – a simple topic or the topic given for the essay – and ask students to write down, in a short space of time, anything that comes to their mind about it, without paying attention to language accuracy. This should not be corrected or even read by the teacher, but if

the students are willing, they can share what they wrote with the class. The first ideas for the essay may also be ‘nudged’ out through this activity.

### **Writing multiple drafts**

Instead of considering the submitted essay a ‘final product’ in which everything to be perfect, teachers can look at them as drafts of essays. Here, the teacher informs the student of this, and gives students feedback on only on content and the way ideas have been expressed. This is also a way of making marking more efficient, as teachers are often burdened with too much marking, which often results in the teacher not giving adequate feedback on improving the overall content, and focusing too much on word-level areas like spelling, grammar and punctuation.

### **Developing paragraphs**

In the essay classroom, writing exercises to develop paragraphs also could be done. A section of an outline can be chosen for this, ie a point to argue in favour of free education. Developing a paragraph will give the teacher a chance to focus on the sentence- and word-level issues in writing, such as writing different types of sentences, how to maintain cohesion, writing topic sentences, and using appropriate vocabulary and expressions. Developing complex sentences out of simple sentences, organising sentences into a logical order, creating paragraphs based on key words can be some of these activities. Such activities can be done, and feedback given, within the school period, unlike a full length essay.

## **Group writing activities**

Full length essays can be written in the classroom in groups of four or five as ‘jigsaw writing activities’. Here, the students can develop an outline of an essay in their group, and then the points in the outline are divided among the group, with each student writing a part of the essay. Finally, the introduction and the conclusion can be done together. As the students engage in writing, the teacher can visit the groups and offer them advice on the writing task and help the students with any difficulties they face, whether it is to do with language, content, or organization. Students should be encouraged to turn to the teacher for help. This activity allows students to help each other in the process of writing, and makes it more social and enjoyable by reducing the feeling of isolation associated with writing. This activity also reflects writing tasks in real life, as often, official reports and business reports are written collaboratively in a similar process.

## **Reformulation**

Reformulation is an innovative way of giving feedback to on language errors. Once a student hands in an essay to be marked, the teacher gets the essay rewritten by a proficient writer (another teacher) correcting all the language errors, but taking care not to change anything else. Particularly the student’s ideas should remain. To do this, some discussion with the student will be useful so that the content will not be changed inadvertently. The teacher then presents both versions to the class for all the students to see how the essay has been improved in terms of expression. The students can discuss what improvements have been made by comparing the two. This is also an effective activity to show students what an improved essay looks like, which students rarely get to see.

## **Conferencing**

The teacher meets students individually or in small groups and corrects their essays and gives feedback in their presence, discussing what they have written and asking for clarifications, while also encouraging the students to ask questions and to talk about difficulties they faced when writing the essay. Sometimes, in the process of correcting students' language errors, we may inadvertently change what they wanted to say. Conferencing prevents this as it gives the teacher a chance to check with the student. This approach is also useful as students are of different levels and it is often difficult to address all their needs in whole-class feedback. It also gives the students a chance to talk about their difficulties to the teacher in a more private and quiet atmosphere.

## **Reading for writing**

Developing students' awareness of effective writing styles and different genres of writing also contributes to the development of their own writing skills. Rather than looking at old-fashioned Model Essays, the teacher can select authentic texts -- well-written essays from newspapers, news magazines and journals -- which can be given to the students to discuss and identify features of good writing. Students can be trained through practice to identify features of good writing: effective organization, effective use of vocabulary and the types of grammar and sentence structures (are they all complex sentences? How many simple sentences? Is the article written mostly in the passive voice? etc) Developing an awareness of what good writing is will have a positive impact on their own writing skills. The same can be done with examples of bad writing, which will give students an idea of what to avoid doing in their essay.

## **Peer evaluation**

Peer evaluation – students commenting on other students’ writing – can be an effective activity to improve essays. However, asking students to grade their classmates writing should be done with caution, even though there may be students who are very good at it, because this can lead to mistrust and even a breakdown of friendships. Instead, students’ ideas on adding to the content of the essays will be more effective. At the same time, the teacher should lay down some ground rules (and also follow them himself!) on how suggestions and criticisms can be made politely, without being too harsh or overly critical.

## **Different types of writing**

Broadly speaking, four main types of writing have been identified by expert teachers of essay writing.

They are:

1. Descriptive
2. Narrative
3. Expository
4. Persuasive or Argumentative

## **Descriptive writing**

- Describes people, things, events
- Uses sensory details: appearance, smell, feel, taste
- Often based on observations of the writer, but can be objective as well
- Examples of descriptive writing:

+ a description of the scene of an oil spill in an essay on environmental pollution, the + a scene of a car accident in an essay on Traffic Hazards

## **Narrative writing**

- Usually tells a story in sequence of events, or a plot, often written, though not exclusively, in the first person
- Can present a personal point of view based on the experiences of writer, 1<sup>st</sup> person
- Includes features of descriptive writing – describes what things look and feel like
- Examples of narrative writing:
  - how a child-servant spends his day in an essay on children’s rights
  - how tea is produced in an essay on the tea industry

## **Expository writing**

- Exposition = “explanation”
- There are different types of expository essays, with some overlap in them:  
Compare and contrast Cause and effect Pros and cons
- Based on opinions supported by data or on expert opinion
- So needs information from real sources to support the writer’s argument
- Use of neutral, impartial language (third person, increase in passivisation, neutral vocabulary, avoidance of slang and colloquial expressions)  
Examples of neutral vocabulary: avoidance of ‘emotive’ words like “pathetic”, “terrible”, “awful”, avoiding ‘flowery’ and poetic expressions (like “childhood is a blooming bud”) and bombastic language
- A reasoning tone that avoids moralizing and preaching: avoid sweeping comments like “People have become greedy and mercenary”
- More complex organization. For example, compare and contrast which essays have two possible organizational structures, described as AAABBB and ABABAB.

- Examples:
  - The advantages and the disadvantages of the Internet
  - Competitive sports – a boon or a bane
  - English Medium education
  - Rural Life and Urban Life.

## **Persuasive writing**

- Most advanced type of writing, comes close to academic and professional writing
- Combines most features of expository writing
- The writer displays a wider knowledge of the topic: its positive and negative sides.
- The writer often addresses both sides of the argument before making a standpoint
- The writer's own point of view is presented with caution, especially if it can be considered controversial: use of hedging terms such as “probably”, “perhaps”, “it is possible that” “rather”, “somewhat”, “it appears to be”, “the information indicates” “it may be said that” “this (information or data) suggests that...” etc.
- The structure of the essay may be more complex because the writer addresses both sides of the argument.

### **An example of how a persuasive essay can be structured:**

Paragraph 1: General introduction of the problem. Thesis statement which states your opinion.

Paragraph 2-3: History of the problem (including, perhaps, past attempts at a solution). Sources needed.

Paragraph 4-6: Extent of the problem (who is affected; how bad is it, etc.). Sources needed.

Paragraphs 7-8: Repercussion of the problem if not solved. Sources needed.

Paragraphs 9-10: You should have led up to a conclusion that your argument is sound. Pull it all together by connecting your argument with the facts. Anticipate objections and make concessions.

Paragraph 11: Conclusion: Restatement of thesis and summary of main ideas.

(Jennifer Jordan Cowley, 1988)

<http://www.roanestate.edu/owl&writingcenter/OWL/Argument.html>, accessed January 20, 2009

- Also needs sources of information, often published ones, and to cite these sources of information
- More analysis and interpretation of the information
- Data and information is presented with precision. For example, “20 million people” rather than “a lot of people”, use of “approximately” if the exact number is not known.
- An impartial tone, formal/neutral language as in expository writing (professional / academic writing)
- Examples of persuasive essays: Most AL essay topics require this approach
  - Technology divides the world more than unites it.
  - Free Education and Free Healthcare - Sri Lanka can no longer afford it!
  - Globalization affects developing countries adversely.
  - The only responsibility of the Media is to report the truth.
  - Freedom of expression is not only a right, but also a responsibility
  - The Spirit of Competition - a necessary evil

## **Some final tips**

In order to prepare students for the A/Levels, it is advised that teachers first train students to write untimed essays with multiple drafts, and then move on to writing timed essays of one draft.

Developing essay writing skills extends beyond the writing classroom, as every good teacher knows. Encouraging extensive reading of newspapers, journals, news magazines and other types of writing not only make students familiar with good writing practices, but also develops a level of general knowledge that is required in the essay at the A/Levels. Keeping up to date with significant events in local and international news, up-to-date facts and figures of perennial issues like war and violence, and developing an awareness of the many sides of controversial issues, all of which are needed for an effective AL essay, will also be developed through extensive reading.

## **References**

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## **Studying Unseen Passages of Prose and Poetry**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Studying unseen passages of prose and poetry is a fundamental skill that students of literature must develop in order to reach literary competence. The study of such unseens are expected to develop the following sub-skills or competency levels:

- (a) Recognize the main features of prose and poetry.
- (b) Make inferences correctly and read insightfully.
- (c) Identify and analyze literary techniques.
- (d) Respond to different levels of meaning.

### **2.0 Why do we study unseen texts?**

Studying unseen texts provide opportunities for the following;

- (a) To read short texts and become aware of text structure (textuality) i.e. interconnectedness and references.
- (b) To become aware of features of literary language (language in a literary text)
- (c) To see at close range the various techniques used by writers to give expression and power to their writing and thus enhance and enrich meaning.
- (d) Learn to read longer texts. Eg: drama, fiction, etc.

### **3.0 The unseen text as a test item.**

In literature tests, unseen passages of prose and poems are used as test items. It is an effective tool to assess whether learners have the primary/ initial skills for reading serious literature.

### **4.0 Reading unseen prose.**

Passages could be taken from any text- short fiction or novel or any other narrative. In attempting to develop competency level (a) a teacher can use a short text like the following:

The young people were all at home, and sustained their share in the introduction very well, with much good humour, and no embarrassment, at least on the part of the sons, who at seventeen and sixteen, and tall of their age, had all the grandeur of men in the eyes of their little cousin. The two girls were more at a loss from being younger and in greater awe of their father, who addressed them on the occasion with rather an injudicious particularity. But they were too much used to company and praise, to have anything like natural shyness, and their confidence increasing from their cousin's total want of it, they were soon able to take a full survey of her face and her frock in easy indifference

(a) How would you describe the text?

(b) What is the topic?

## 4.1 Context

Like in any other paragraph, in this extract from a novel, a certain amount of information is imparted. For example there is a context.

Answer the following questions to get the context.

- (a) How many characters are mentioned?
- (b) What is the situation?
- (c) Who is introduced?
- (d) What is the reception of the boys to the newcomer?
- (e) Do the girls give the same 'welcome'? What are the words used in the text?
- (f) How old are the boys?
- (g) How does the newcomer feel? What words and phrases express those feelings?

Apparently the context is where a young relation comes/ is brought to live as a member of a big/ rich family. After reflecting on the context one can go on to think on the setting.

## 4.2. Setting

Find answers to the following questions.

- (a) Does the setting seem contemporary? If not why not?
- (b) What features in the language make you think that the text is not set in a contemporary background?
- (c) What customs/ manners/ practices in the text convey the idea that it is not of our time?

It is evident that the setting is not contemporary. In considering 4.2(b) reflect on the following language features:

- (i) Vocabulary used – the young people, sustained their share, good humour, grandeur of men, greater awe of their father, injudicious particularly, cousin’s total want of it, take a full survey of the face.

How would you describe this language:

- (a) Formal
- (b) Archaic
- (c) Bookish
- (ii) Grammar – tall of their age.
- (iii) Sentence structure – 3 run on sentences with subordinate clauses and many phrases. In considering 4.2 (c), reflect on the following statements.
- a. The visitor/ new comer (their cousin) is introduced in a formal family gathering to her cousins.
  - b. The girls were in awe of their father.
  - c. They were trained in manners.

In Sri Lanka today, it is not possible to find this kind of situation. Nor would you find it in contemporary England. Relationships are much more casual, natural. So this must be an older age.

### 4.3. Inference

In order to think like this we must infer that is draw conclusions from the evidence in the text as well as bring our experience of reading literary texts to it.

Find answers to the following questions:

- (i) What is the reception accorded by the ‘sons’ to the newcomer?
- (ii) What is the reception accorded by the two girls? Is it the same as that of the ‘sons’?

- (iii) Who put her more at ease?
- (iv) Was the cousin of the same status?

In answering the two questions consider the following words and phrases:

- (a) With much good humour.
- (b) In easy indifference.
- (c) Their confidence increasing from their cousin's total want of it.

#### 4.4 . Understanding structure of text (textuality)

The paragraph is closely knit. Consider the following features;

- (a) The topic/ theme. Eg: coming of a cousin (apparently from a poorer environment) and the reaction of the richer cousins to her coming.
- (b) Content – reception of the new comer by the (a) boy cousins (two) and (b) the girl cousins.
- (c) Feelings of a (a) and (b) and (c) the new comer.
- (d) Techniques (a) Contrast (between the reception of the sons and daughters) (b) irony (too much used to company and praise, to have anything like natural shyness, survey of her face and frock in easy indifference)
- (e) Reference
  - i. Young people
    - Their
    - On the part of the sons
    - The two girls
    - Them, they, their
  - ii. Young cousin
    - Cousins
    - Her

- (f) Narrative structure – a new event has taken place. It could be a significant event in the plot of the novel. A new character has been introduced.
- (g) Point of view - very little. But the writer seems to be critical of the two girl cousins – the suggestion that they felt superior. This is however said in a very subtle manner.

## 5 Reading unseen poems.

In reading the passage of prose, its structure was recognized as a formal paragraph. There is a beginning – introduction of the new comer cousin – and an end- reception accorded to her by the other young members of the family. The content is arranged in three long complex sentences.

### 5.1 The Structure/ Form of a Poem/ poetic text.

See the following text. Remark on its structure. Use the following guidelines.

#### Design

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—  
Assorted characters of death and blight  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?  
What brought the kindred spider to that height,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?  
What but design of darkness to appall?—  
If design govern in a thing so small.

- (a) How many stanza/ verses are there?
- (b) How many lines make up stanza/ verse 1?
- (c) How many lines make up stanza/ verse 2?
- (d) What is this kind of poetic structure/ form called?
- (e) What is the connection between the two verses/ stanzas in terms of (a) development of idea/ theme (b) use of imagery (c) conclusion made by the writer?
- (f) How is the structure of this text different to the earlier paragraph of prose?
- (g) Trace the pattern of rhyme in the sonnet.
  - i. Stanza one?
  - ii. Stanza two?
  - iii. What are the lines that do not rhyme?
- (h) Look up the definition of sonnet in part 1 of the resource book/ literary encyclopaedia. Do you think the sonnet is suitable to put forward the idea/ theme the poet is developing? Why?

## 5.2 Difference between prose and poetry.

Vary naively you would have thought of the difference

- (a) Arrangement of lines on the page.
- (b) Length of each line.
- (c) Rhythm in each line/ whole poem.
- (d) Division into octave and sestet.
- (e) Organization under a topic (design).

There seems to be a beginning – an experience : ‘I found a dimpled spider’ – and an end: ‘design of darkness to appall?’ There are facts too- the tiny white spider seated on a common wild flower also white (which ordinary people think has a healing quality) is holding a dead moth (apparently killed by it) which is also white. But the facts do not convey any new information like the passage of prose. The facts do not connect with an event or a character. What do they connect with, then? With the writer’s experience? His observation? How does it relate to us?

**5.2.1** Go back to the text again. What other special feature do you notice in it. Eg: images used- where there any images used in the prose. There was reference made to the new comer’s clothes/ face. But apart from that there were no images.

Make a list of the images used in the poem.

- i.
- ii.
- iii.

Fill the following chart to get an idea about the way. The images are used:

Adjective similes			Metaphors (singly used)	
1.	Spider	Dimpled. Fat and white kindred.		A snow drop Used all for
2.	Heal all (flower)	White	Like a froth	The way side blue and innocent (heal all)
3.	Moth		Like a white piece of satin cloth (dead wings carried) like a paper kite	Assorted characters of death and blight.
4.	Design	of darkness.		Ingredients of a witches' broth.

*Note: Contrast the images used to describe the spider with those used for the moth.*

**Reflect on the following**

- (a) How has the moth died? What does it look like now?
- (b) The heal- all (usually blue) is now white. How has this happened?
- (c) How does the word design relate to the three 'white' images? In attempting to answer this question would you connect/ link the following lines”  
‘what brought the kindred spider to that height’,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?

- (d) Does it suggest the working of nature? Is nature always benevolent/ life giving? Are there agencies in it which are not? In fact is there a design
- [a] For one creature to survive on the other?
- [b] For things to get diseased, stricken by sickness (blight)?
- (e) In considering the last question read the last two lines again:  
 ‘what but design of darkness to appall? If design govern in a thing so small.
- (f) Does nature has its laws? Do they apply to both big and small creatures/ things Why is it called a design of darkness?

### **5.3 Levels of meaning.**

- (a) What is the topic/ subject of the poem?
- (b) Check the word ‘assorted’ in a dictionary. In what contexts is this word most frequently used (assorted cakes, assorted sweets)? What effect is created by the use of the word here? (Assorted characters of death and blight)
- (c) Look for the various meanings of ‘design’ in a dictionary. Which are the most relevant for this poem?
- (d) What is meant by a ‘witches’, broth? What makes up the witches’ broth in this context?
- (e) What is responsible for this ‘outcome’? What is meant by ‘design of darkness?’ is evil part of the scheme of things? Life, Nature?
- (f) What is the theme of the poem?