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(специальности ТиМПИЯК, ИЯ)

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Введение

Настоящее учебно-методическое пособие имеет целью совершенствование лексических навыков и умений, а также формирование и совершенствование умений семантико-стилистического анализа художественного текста.

Пособие включает в себя 6 произведений современных английских авторов: “The Language of Water” D.S. Mackenzie, “Empire Building” Deborah Moggach, “Chemistry” Graham Swift, “A Shooting Season” Rose Tremain, “Mr Tennyson” William Trevor, “The Bottom Line and the Sharp End” Fay Weldon.

Для оптимизации процесса подготовки к дискуссии тексты снабжены языковыми и речевыми упражнениями. Речевые упражнения позволяют не только проконтролировать общее понимание прочитанного, но и сформулировать основную идею, проблематику, структурно-композиционные особенности художественного текста, выявить подтекст и символы. Тексты снабжены следующими лексическими упражнениями: перевод лексических единиц с русского языка на английский, объяснение их значений в контексте, представление синонимов. Самый большой блок упражнений занимают вопросы, концентрирующие внимание читающих на самых стилистически и семантически значимых для анализа текста эпизодах. В ходе выполнения упражнений студенты устанавливают причинно-следственные связи, анализируют взаимоотношения героев и определяют личностные характеристики персонажей с помощью стилистически-маркированных цитат.

Пособие предназначено для студентов 5 курса очного отделения.

The Language of Water

D.S. Mackenzie

David Mackenzie (born on May, 10, 1966) is a Scottish writer, film director and screenwriter. He was a social worker, then taught English abroad and worked as a systems analyst. His first novel, “The Truth of Stone”, was published in 1991. Together with his younger brother Alastair, an actor, he founded the production company “Stigma Films”.

The Language of Water

D.S. Mackenzie

I went fishing with Garfield the other day. It was a cold, bright, cloudless morning and the pool I had chosen on the river was flat and lifeless like a huge skein of grey silk. I knew we wouldn’t catch anything and so did Garfield but I feigned enthusiasm and said I’d caught two sea-trout there the day before. Although it was a lie I was able to carry it off reasonably well because I had caught two but in a different part of the river.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘there’s a fish in there for us.’

Garfield stood in his worn-out old green waders and studied the water carefully. He looked out from under the brim of his fore-and-aft and saw the mirror-like surface of the big, slow, lazy eddy on the far side. There wasn’t a single ripple on the water and the bushes and trees upon the bank were motionless with not a leaf stirring. ‘It looks a bit flat to me,’ Garfield said.

I usually go fishing alone. The river is beautiful, especially in the summer at half past five or six in the morning when it is already light and the sea-trout are beginning to move in the pools. There is a particular favourite spot of mine away down river by the estuary. It is hard to get to and if I’m there really early I can remain undisturbed for hours. I used to go fishing with my father and now I

sometimes go with my brother but I usually go alone. I suppose it's just that I'm selfish.

It was a little different with Garfield. Garfield is an old man. He used to go fishing with my father whom he knew for thirty years or so. He went for company rather than any real wish to catch fish. He never went fishing with anyone else and rarely caught any trout. In fact, when my father died six years ago, Garfield gave up fishing, although it could be said that he had never really taken it up in the first place. Two weeks ago Garfield asked me to go fishing with him and what would normally have been an imposition became something I felt I wanted to do. No, perhaps that isn't quite right. What I wanted was that Garfield should catch a fish.

It sounds condescending and I want to avoid that. Garfield is not a child that you desperately want to succeed in some small way so that you can heap praise on him. He is a man of about seventy who still fills me with confusion when I address him because I know that 'Mr McLeod' is too formal now but I baulk at calling him Garfield. I meet him rarely so this little problem has never been resolved satisfactorily. I wonder if he is aware of it. Probably not.

My feelings about Garfield are further bedevilled by what Garfield has become. He has shrunk - almost literally - from the strong, commanding figure he once was to the slighter, more tentative person that old age and illness have rendered him. I remember a solid, heavy-set man, bullish both in his physique and in his driving attitude to life. He was a farm manager and had large, grained fanner's hands with thick fingers and fingernails like chips of stone. When I was a child I felt that these fingers could take my arm and snap it in two.

Garfield now is thin and rather unsteady on his feet. He has a variety of cancer - I'm not sure which - and has only about two years to live.

Just after the death of my father, Garfield made a strange request, stranger perhaps because he made it of me. He asked me to take a photograph from my father's bedroom window, looking down towards the river. He wanted a photo that

would show the path by the side of the field, the trees, the big pool and the fields and farms beyond. I agreed of course, but never got round to it. So here is the beginning of a feeling of guilt which is mixed in with all the other feelings making the whole lot more confused than before.

I find it difficult to like him. I strive to like him. He is a person you must take uncompromisingly on his terms. (Even in this there is the beginning of admiration for him.) He is a straight talker, direct to the point of bluntness. He spent some time in South America when he was a young man and I once gave him a book about the area he had lived in. He was scathingly critical of the book, leafing through it when I gave it to him and criticising it even before he had read it properly. I was a bit hurt by this, feeling he should have tempered his comments, particularly as the book was a gift. I had just returned from South America, though not the same place as he had lived in. I felt that he was indirectly criticising me as well, the inference being that I should know better. I had been there and therefore I should know better. Couldn't I see that this fellow had drawn all the wrong conclusions, had made judgements based on very little experience? In fact Garfield didn't say this at all. Neither did he say thank you.

Garfield arrived for our morning's fishing at about nine fifteen. His big old estate car has rust on the wings and Garfield complained that if he continued buying new parts for it at the present rate he would have a brand new car in a year or two as nothing of the original would remain. It was a joke but I could see that it was also a niggling little worry. He has had to accept a lower standard of living since he retired and a new car is out of the question. As he got his fishing gear out of the back, his rod in its cloth case, his landing net, bag and waders, I noticed that one of the rear tyres was almost flat. It had a slow leak, he said, and he usually pumped it up every morning. This morning he had forgotten. I had no pump and suggested that we change the wheel there and then but he said no, wait till we get back from the river. Then there was the question of how to get to the pool. I had chosen the nearest pool but even this ten-minute walk seemed a bit

long to Garfield. I suggested that he could drive round the village to the bridge above the pool and I could walk down through the fields carrying the rods since we had already put the rods up. He agreed, and then we remembered the flat tyre. Right, I said, let's do it now, let's change the wheel now. But he said no, no, no, it would be all right, he would walk down with me. I began to feel that it had all started badly, that things were already out of my grasp, beyond control, that the morning could no longer be saved. We set off eventually on foot and I wanted to offer to carry his bag but I couldn't for fear of I calling him a weak old man. We took it gently, a quiet, unhurried stroll, and when we arrived at the pool the sun was quite high and the water was smooth and silver and very beautiful but I knew we wouldn't catch anything.

"There's a fish in there for us,' I said. 'Don't worry.'

'It looks a bit flat to me.' Garfield said.

We are in the landrover. I am in the passenger seat and Garfield is driving. He is driving fast along the ratted track that leads to the Outpost and he is punishing the machine which is bouncing over the pitted earth, flinging up mud to either side. I am finding it difficult to maintain my balance and my fingers hold on tight to the edge of the grey leather seat because my feet can find no purchase on the metal floor. In fact my feet hardly reach the floor. It is 1958 and I am nine years old.

'There she is, Sandy!' Mr McLeod says, pointing up ahead to a large stone building reached through a wooden five-bar gate which has swung open over a huge area of mud. There seem to be acres of mud; the big bam known as the Outpost is afloat in a sea of it. Mr McLeod draws the landrover up as near the big red sliding door of the barn as possible. When the vehicle stops I can feel the tingling in my fingers and my bottom as the seat is at last still underneath me. By the time I regain my composure Mr McLeod has left the landrover, drawn back the huge red barn door and has disappeared inside.

From the landrover, when I open the door, I look down on nothing but brown mud. I am wearing a new pair of wellingtons that I know are meant for such situations but I don't want to get them dirty. It would be easier, really, if I got out on Mr McLeod's side as it is nearer the door of the barn but I feel I should ask him first if this is okay, this crossing over into his territory, but I can't because he has already gone and I wouldn't want to call him back just for this...

Eventually I get out my own side and tiptoe, insofar as I am able to, round to the door. My Wellingtons are now muddy despite my efforts but I will be able to wash them at the outside tap in the yard when I get home so no one will be angry with me. Mr McLeod is inside the big empty barn, over there at the far end. He has a hoe in his hand. There is nothing in the barn but the smell the hay has left behind. The concrete floor is dry and clean. I turn round and see the muddy footprints I have left when making the few steps from the door. Will Mr McLeod be angry? He has left footprints too, I notice, so maybe it isn't so bad after all. But then I remember that perhaps this reasoning will not hold, perhaps it is all right for Mr McLeod to make the floor muddy but not me. Maybe he will be upset. It is his barn. Mr McLeod has the hoe in his hand and he is poking about with it above his head at the ends of the rafters where the sloping roof meets the top of the wall What is he doing? I go back to the door and kick off as much mud from my boots as I can. That should do. When I walk-across" the concrete floor now there is hardly a mark. I make my way towards Mr McLeod. There are tiny shrieks of alarm from a half-fledged baby pigeon which whirs down on immature wings from the rafters to the floor about halfway between Mr McLeod and me. It sets off running towards me. Γ have never seen one so close before and I bend down towards it in wonder at the strange mixture of grey feathers and pink flesh. I am half aware that Mr McLeod is coming up behind the little bird, in fact he is running. I have my hands out, feeling I might be able to scoop up this little creature but just before it reaches me Mr McLeod shouts a warning. He overtakes the squawking,

frightened, scurrying bird and kills it by stamping its head into the concrete floor. I am too shocked to cry. Mr McLeod runs off to kill another pigeon in the same way. The first one, a yard or so in front of me, continues to flutter for about half a minute and then stops. It stays in the same place because it is stuck like glue to the floor. Mr McLeod comes back over and kicks the dead pigeon towards the door of the barn. There is a little red mark on the floor. I try to rub it off with my toe, hoping there is enough mud left on my boot to cover up this red spot. There isn't. All I do is make the mark bigger - red and brown. What about the other pigeon? There is a mark there too, probably. I don't want to go over there. Mr McLeod calls me from the door and I go out. It is raining heavily; the mud is deeper. I get into the landrover. I am thinking of the pigeon, the one Mr McLeod killed in front of me and I still can't speak. Nobody says anything. Nobody says anything until I get to Mr McLeod's house. His wife is in the kitchen and she asks me to take my boots off. I look round and see all the mud I have brought in on the black and white tiles of the kitchen floor.

I decided that everything would be all right if we could catch a fish. It didn't even have to be Garfield who caught it. He couldn't wade far anyway. I had noticed that the rubber of his waders had perished where they had been folded over so there were little holes at knee height. It had been so long since his last fishing trip and they had laid unwanted in a cupboard. Which was worse - to point out to him that there were holes in his waders or let him get his feet wet? I told him. He waded : only a few feet from the bank and I knew he had no chance of I a fish. It would be all right though, even if I could do it; I [could catch one for us. It would be our fish and something would be saved. I fished hard. I cast out as far as I could and worked the fly as delicately as possible across the surface of the water. I ached for a fish to rise but the river said no.

I reeled in and went back to join Garfield. He had already left the water and was lighting up his pipe. We stood in silence for a while and just looked at the river. It was as beautiful as I had ever seen it and I wondered for a moment if catching a fish had really been so important. 'Too flat,' Garfield said, and I was torn between wanting to punch him and wanting to confess that it was all my fault. I could have forgiven him everything, his awkwardness, what he had said about the book, even the pigeons, I could almost have forgiven him for the pigeons if only we could have caught one little fish.

Garfield said he was tired. He took off his fore-and-aft and I could see a little sweat glistening on his forehead. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his face. 'It's a pity,' he said.

We walked back through the fields, slowly. Garfield asked me to carry his rod and his bag and I did.

Learning Activities

LA-1. Skim the story.

1. What is the subject matter of the text under analysis?
2. Where is the scene laid?
3. What is the relationship between the characters?

LA-2. Scan the text.

1. How would you define the composition of the story? What is the role of stylistically relevant blanks separating a story from the past from the main narrative plotline? Does episode from the past throw light on the relationships of the characters in the present? How?
2. What atmosphere does the story create? Why does the author focus on such a seemingly insignificant episode as a fishing trip of several hours?
3. What is the main idea of the story?
4. Comment on the title.

5. What problems does the author touch upon?

Word Study

WS-1. Find the English equivalents for the following words and word combinations. Reproduce the context in which they are used:

притворяться, нетвердо держаться на ногах, прямой до грубости, воздержаться от комментариев, пустяковое беспокойство, усыхать, отправляться в путь.

WS-2. Scan the text and find the following words and word combinations, reproduce the context in which they are used, explain what they mean:

to carry smth off well, to heap praise upon smb, to baulk (balk) at calling smb smth, tentative, a driving attitude to life, to make a request of smb, to get round to smth/doing smth, to take smb on one's terms, reasoning won't hold.

WS-3. Give synonyms to the following words and word combinations:

a penalty, to be beyond control, balance.

Literary Appreciation

1. Read the scene-setting paragraph. Why does the author go into such details describing the river? What means does he use to convey a hopeless and lifeless picture? The narrator knows the trip is doomed to failure, doesn't he? Why does he insist there is still chance to catch a fish?
2. Throughout the story Garfield keeps repeating the sentence "It looks a bit flat to me". What is the role of this repetition? Are there any other recurring words or images?
3. Why does Garfield go fishing? Why does the narrator want the old man to catch a fish? What does the fish symbolize?
4. What is the attitude of the narrator to Garfield? Why can't he call Garfield by his name or "Mr McLeod"?
5. The description of Garfield is given much time, isn't it? Why? What traits of his character do such means reveal: the strong, commanding figure; a solid,

heavy-set man, bullish both in his physique and in his driving attitude to life; his fingernails like chips of stone? What stylistic means are used to render his image?

6. How has Garfield changed since the narrator's childhood? Comment on the sentence "He has shrunk – almost literally - …". What stylistic device describes the switch?

7. Why does the narrator call Garfield's request strange? Why does he have a feeling of guilt before Garfield ("mixed in with all the other feelings making the whole lot more confused than before")?

8. Garfield is a person "you must take uncompromisingly on his terms". Is it a positive characteristic? Don't these words echo a kind of admiration?

9. Besides the usual way of presenting reported speech the author resorts to the following: "…but he said no, wait till we get back from the river"; "Right, I said, let's do it now, let's change the wheel now"; "… he said no, no, no, it would be all right…". Why? How does it affect the rhythmic pattern of the story? Doesn't it remind of such a method as a flow of consciousness?

10. When giving the narrator's flashback into the past the author switches into the present tenses. Does it help to heighten a sense of tension and make the picture more visualized? What are other possible reasons for employing the present?

11. In this episode the word mud is repeated many times. What does it manifest? The boy literally bring in all the mud "on the black and white tiles of the kitchen floor". What role does this reminiscence play in the story?

12. How does the author depict the brutality of the scene in such detail? What is the rhythm of this part of the story? Why does the author focus so much on the action? Why does the boy remember the episode so clearly many years after? How does it influence the boy's (and the man's) perception of Garfield?

13. Expand on the sentence: "It would be our fish and something would be saved".

14. Comment on the personification “I ached for a fish to rise but the river said no”. What is the role of the river and water in general in the story?

15. Comment on the syntactic and semantic anaphoric repetition “I could have forgiven him everything….I could almost have forgiven him for the pigeons if only we could have caught one little fish”.

16. Do the relations between the characters change? What is the evidence of it?

Discussion Points

1. Old age is a period when one can reconsider the past and try to make up for the mistakes.

2. People change especially on the threshold of death.

Empire Building

Deborah Moggach

Deborah Moggach (born Deborah Hough on 28 June 1948) is a English writer. She has written sixteen novels to date, including The Ex-Wives, Tulip Fever, and, most recently, These Foolish Things. She has adapted many of her novels as TV dramas and has also written several film scripts, including the BAFTA-nominated screenplay for Pride & Prejudice. She has also written two collections of short stories and a stage play.

Empire Building

Deborah Moggach

It didn't look much when he took it over, the Empire Stores, but a man with business instinct could see the potential. The previous owners had been fined by the Health Authority' and finally gone bust. Hamid, however, had

standards. His wife told people this too, with a small shake of her head as if she were being philosophical about it.

The neighbourhood was a transient, shabby one, with terraces of bedsits and Irish lodging houses. The parade of shops, Hamid calculated, was far enough from the Holloway Road for people to rely upon it for their local needs, which he had all intention of supplying. The shops were as follows: a wholesale dressmaking business with a curtained window behind which the sewing machines hummed - those Greek ladies knew the meaning of hard work; a dentist's surgery with frosted glass; a greengrocer's that had ageing fruit and early closing on Thursdays - now how can anyone prosper with early closing; then the Empire Stores, and next door to it a newsagent's run by an indolent Hindu and his wife. Hamid put a notice UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT in the window of the Empire Stores and restocked the merchandise - liquor behind the cash desk, where he sat in control, and groceries along the aisles. His aims were not modest, but his beginnings were.

His own wife and children were installed in a flat in Wood Green, three miles away, where the air was fresher and the neighbourhood more salubrious. The streets around the Empire Stores were not respectable; you need only have taken a look at the cards fixed to the newsagent's window -even a family man like Hamid knew the meaning of those kind of French Lessons. Business is business, however, and it is a wise shop keeper who is prepared to adapt. Or, as his father was fond of saying: to those who are flexible comes strength.

The local blacks were big West Indians who drove up in loudly tuned cars and who suddenly filled the shop. They bought party packs of beer in the evenings and left a musky male scent behind them. One of the first things Hamid did was to extend his opening hours until 9 p.m. Then there were the single young ladies who bought Whiskas and yoghurt and disappeared into the sodium-lit streets. How solitary was the life of these young English women with

no family to care for them; no wonder they fell into evil ways. Hamid installed a second cold shelf and stocked it with pizzas, two ranges of yoghurts and individual fruit-juice cartons for these bedsit dwellers and their twilit lives. Such items moved fast.

Sitting at the till, its numbers bleeping, Hamid thought of the dinner being prepared for him at home - the hiss of the spices as they hit the pan, the buttery taste of the paratha he would soon be eating. He thought of his son Arif, his neat, shiny head bent over his homework, the TV turned right down. He thought of his own tartan slippers beside the radiator. Passing them a carrier-bag, he gazed with perplexity at these lost, pasty-faced English girls.

His main income, however, came from the drunks. It was for them that within the first three months he had doubled the bottle shelf-space and increased his range of cans. Business was brisk in Triple Strength Export Lager. These men, their complexions inflamed by alcohol, shambled in at all hours, muttering at the floor, murmuring at the tins of peas. They raised their ruined faces. Hamid avoided their eyes; he took their soiled bank notes or the coins they counted out, shakily, and fixed his gaze above their heads. Flesh upon flesh, sometimes their fingers touched his, but he was too well-mannered to flinch. Sometimes they tried to engage him in conversation.

It was bemusing. Not only did they poison themselves with drink, rotting their souls and their bodies, but they had no shame. They leaned against the dentist's frosted glass, lifting the bottle to their lips in full public view. They stood huddled together in the exit of the snooker hall, further up the road, where warm air breathed from the grilles. Sometimes he could hear the smash of glass. Lone men stood in the middle of the road, shouting oaths into the air.

Business is business. Sometimes he raised his eyebrows at Khalid, his nephew, who helped him in the shop, but he never offended his wife by

describing to her this flotsam and jetsam. One night she said: 'You never talk to me.'

It was the next week that a man stumbled in and steadied himself against the counter. He asked for a bottle of cider and then he said: 'You'll put it on the slate?'
'I beg your pardon?' Hamid raised his eyes from his newspaper.
'I'll pay tomorrow.'
'I'm sorry,' Hamid said. 'It is not shop policy.'

The man started shouting. 'You fucking wog!' he yelled, his voice rising. Hamid lowered his gaze back to the dancing Urdu script. He turned the page.
'Get back to the fucking jungle, fucking wog land!' the voice slurred - 'where you belong!'

Khalid appeared from the stock-room and stood there. Hamid kept his eye on the page. He read that there was a riot in Lahore, where an opposition leader had been arrested, and that ghee was up Rs 2 per seer.
'Fucking monkeys!'

Khalid put down the crate of Schweppes" and escorted the man to the door. The next day Hamid wrote a notice and Sellotaped it to the counter.

He sat there, as grave as always, in his herringbone tweed jacket. He held himself straight as the men shambled in, those long-lost rulers of a long-lost Empire, eyeing the bottles behind him. He had written the notice in large red letters, using Arifs school Pentel: PLEASE DO NOT ASK FOR CREDIT AS A REFUSAL OFTEN OFFENDS.

That was in the late seventies. War was being waged in the Middle East; a man had walked on the moon; Prince Charles had still not found a wife. Meanwhile Hamid filled out his VAT receipts, and in view of increased turnover negotiated further discount terms with McEwans, manufacturers of lager.

In 1980 the old couple who ran the greengrocer's retired and Hamid bought the shop, freehold, and extended his own premises, knocking through the dividing wall and removing the sign H. LAWSON FRUITERER AND GREENGROCER.

Apart from 'good morning', the first and last conversation he ever held with the old man was on completion day, when they finalized the transaction in the lawyer's office down the road.

'Times change,' said the old man, Mr Lawson. The clock whirred, clicked and chimed. He sighed. 'Been here thirty years.'

They signed the document and shook hands.

'Harold,' said Hamid, reading the signature. 'So that's - your name.'

'You know, I was in your part of the world.'

'My part?' asked Hamid.

'India.'

'Ah.'

'In the army. Stationed near Mysore. Know it?'

Hamid shook his head. 'My family comes from Pakistan.'

They stood up. 'Funny old world, isn't it,' said the old man. Hamid agreed, politely. The lawyer opened the door for them.

'How about a quickie,' said the old man.

'I beg your pardon?'

'Little celebration.'

Hamid paused. 'I don't drink.'

They reached the head of the stairs. 'No,' said the old man. 'No, I suppose you don't. Against your religion, eh?'

Hamid nodded. 'You first, please,' he said, indicating the stairs.

'No, you.'

Hamid went first. They emerged into the sunlight. It was a beautiful day in April. Petals lay strewn in the gutter.

'If I'd been blessed with a son, maybe this wouldn't be happening,' said the old man. 'But that's life.' Hamid nodded. 'You've got a son?'
'Yes,' said Hamid. 'A fine chap.'
'Expect he'll be coming in with you, in due course.'
Hamid murmured something politely; he didn't want to offend the old man. Arif, running a shop? He had greater things in mind for his son.

Hamid had a new, larger sign fitted to cover the new, double shop-front and this time had it constructed in neon-illuminated script: THE EMPIRE STORES. He extended both his liquor and grocery range to cover the extra volume of retail space, adding a chicken rotisserie for take-outs, a microwave for samosas and a large range of fruit and vegetables - all of a greatly improved quality to those of H. Lawson. The old man had left the place like a junk heap; it took seven skips to clear the rubbish out of the upper floor and the backyard. One morning Hamid was out in the street, inspecting a heaped skip, when one of his customers stopped. She was an old woman; she pointed at the skip with her umbrella.
'See that?' she said. 'The wheels? Used to have a pony and cart. Harry did. For the deliveries.'
'Did he really?' Hamid glanced up the street. He was waiting for the builders who were late again. Unreliable.
'Knew us all by name.' She sighed and wiped her nose. 'No...' She shook her head. 'Service is not what it was'
'No,' agreed Hamid, looking at his watch and thinking of his builders.'It certainly isn't.'

Hamid, who always bought British, traded in his old Cortina and bought a brand-new Rover, with beige upholstery and stereo-player. He transferred Arifto a private school, its sign painted in Gothic script, where they sang hymns and wore blazers. On Parents' Day the panelled halls smelt of polish; Hamid gazed at

the cabinets of silver cups. His wife wore her best silk sari; her bangles tinkled as she smoothed Arifs hair.

The conversion of the upper floors, above the old fruit shop, was completed at last and Hamid stood on the other side of the street with Khalid and his two new assistants. He looked at the sunlight glinting in the windows; he looked at the dazzling white paint and the sign glowing below it: THE EMPIRE STORES. His heart swelled. The others chattered, but he could not speak.

That night Arif stood, his eyes closed and his face pinched with concentration, and recited:

'Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;'

His eyes opened. 'Know who it's by?'

Hamid shook his head. 'You tell me, son.'

'William Wordsworth. We're learning it at school.'

For the second time that day, Hamid's heart swelled. He put his arms around his son, the boy for whom everything was possible. He pressed his face against his son's cheek.

1981. Ronald Reagan became President of the USA. In May the Pope was shot and wounded. In Brixton there were riots; Toxteth too. In July Prince Charles married his Lady Di.

Khalid, too, was married by now and installed in the first-floor flat above the shop. National holidays were always good, business-wise; by now the

Empire Stores was open seven days a week and during that summer's day, as people queued at the till, Hainid kept half an eye on his portable TV set. A pale blur, as Lady Di passed in her dress; a peal of bells. As Hamid reached for the bottles of whiskey, the commentator's voice quickened with pride and awe, and Hamid's heart beat faster. 'Isn't she a picture,' said his customers, pausing at the screen. Hamid agreed that, yes, she was the most radiant of brides. Flags waved, flicking to and fro, and the crowd roared. Our Princess, his and theirs... Hamid smiled and gave a small boy a Toblerone.

That night his wife said: 'You should have seen it in colour.'

Hamid pulled off his shoes. 'You've put it on the video-tape?'

She nodded and turned away, picking up the scattered jigsaw in front of the TV, where his daughters had been sitting.

'We can watch it later,' he said.

'When?' Her voice was sharp. He looked up in surprise. 'It's not the same,' she said, closing the box.

That night a bottle was thrown up through the window of Khalid's flat. It shattered the glass; Khalid's bride cowered in the corner.

The next day, while the Royal couple - oh how happy they looked - departed on their honeymoon, Hamid inspected the damage. He gazed down into the street, through the wicked edges of glass. They were intruders, those people entering the Empire Stores. Yesterday's glory had vanished. Hamid sat down heavily, on the settee.

'How could they do this to us?' he asked. 'What have we done to deserve it?'

Khalid, who was an easy-going chap, said: 'Forget it. They were just celebrating.' He lowered his voice, so his bride couldn't hear. 'They were one over the eight.'

'What?'

'Drunk.'

Drunk on the drink he had sold to them. Yesterday they had had record takings.

He closed up the shop that night and walked to his car. On the pavement lay a man, asleep, his face bleeding. Cans lay around him. Hamid remembered how once, years ago, he had called an ambulance when he had found a person in this state. Now he just made a detour on the other side of the pavement.

That autumn he installed closed-circuit surveillance in the shop. He now had three assistants and an expanded range of take-away food. Children from neglectful homes came in with shopping bags; they had keys around their necks, and runny noses. They bought bars of Kit Kat and crisps and hot pasties. These mothers did not look after their youngsters; they sent them into the streets to consume junk food.

The dressmaker's was taken over by a massage and sauna establishment, which installed black glass and a Georgian door. All about lay the ruined and the dispossessed. This was their country but these people had no homes. New, loitering men replaced the old. Strange faces appeared for a week, a month, and then after a while he would realize they had vanished. To where? His neon sign shone out over the drab street. Inside the shop lay the solace of food, and order.

That year his turnover doubled. He fitted out an office in the store-room and managed his growing empire from there, drinking tea from his Charles and Di commemoration mug. He had now converted four flats above the shop, and the lease of the newsagent's shop next door was coming up shortly; he had his eye on that.

In an attempt to brighten the neighbourhood, the council had planted young trees along the pavement. Their leaves were turning red and falling to the ground. Opposite, the sunset flamed above the chimney-pots. As he said his evening prayers on the mat behind his desk, he felt both humbled and grateful.

That evening he looked into his girls' bedroom. They were two sleeping heads. Arif was in the lounge, bent over his computer game. Hamid ruffled his hair; Arif smoothed it down again.

'And have you a hello for your father?'

Arif pressed a button. '570,' he said. '680.'

Later, when Arif was asleep and Hamid had eaten, he said to his wife: 'They teach them no manners at that expensive school?'

She turned, 'You think you can buy manners with money?'

He looked sharply at her. She was putting the crockery away in the cabinet.

'What are you trying to say?' he asked. - Manners are taught by example. At home.'

'And don't I set a good example?'

'When you're here.' She sighed, and shut the cabinet. 'I think he is suffering from neglect.'

'You say that about my son?'

Neglect? Hamid thought of the boys with faces like old men's, and keys around their necks. Pale boys buying junk food.

'It's his age,' said Hamid loudly, surprising himself. 'He's fourteen now. A difficult age.'

'If you say so.'

She sighed again and reached up for something on the top of the cabinet. It was a box of Milk Tray. How plump she was becoming; her kurta was strained tight over her belly.

'Come to the shop,' he said, 'and there I'll show you the meaning of neglect.'

She sat down, shaking her head in that philosophical way. More and more she irked him by doing this. She examined a chocolate and popped it into her mouth. He looked at her and the word rose up: junk food.

He ignored this. Instead he asked: 'Doesn't Arif understand? I'm working for him. For all the family.' He ran his fingers through his hair. 'For the future.'

His voice rose higher. She glanced warningly towards the bedrooms. 'I'm working so that he need never work in a shop! You understand me, woman? Can't you understand?'

She said nothing, though she tilted her head. He thought she was assenting, but then he saw she was just choosing another chocolate.

Hindus are lazy. History has proved that point. Their religion is a dissipated one; Their life-style one of self-indulgence, of the inaction that comes from fatalism. Take Mr Gupta's attitude, for example, to the expiry of his lease. He smiled and raised his hands: the new price was too high; he had this trouble with his stomach; he had been robbed three times in the past year. What be, will be...

Hamid would have suggested that Mr Gupta invest in vandal-proof shuttering, as he himself had done. But he could always have that fitted when he took over the lease, which he did just as the trees outside frothed into blossom, in celebration.

Islam is a progressive faith. He progressed, removing Mr Gupta's sign and installing THE EMPIRE NEWSAGENTS over the door. He now had one double shop and one single; his properties dominated the parade of shops. Indeed, that week several of his customers joked that he'd soon be taking over the street. Hamid smiled modestly.

The state of that shop! The squalor and the unexploited sales area! The possibilities! It was a dusty little con-tob newsagent's when Hamid took it over, but after a complete refitment he had doubled the shelf space and the stock, and introduced fast-profit items including a rental Slush-Puppy dispenser in six flavours - a favourite with the local latch-key children.

Dirty magazines, he was not surprised to discover, had a brisk sale in this neighbourhood and he increased the stock from seven titles to fourteen. Knave and Mayfair, bulging flesh ... he kept his eyes from this nude shamelessness. He placed such journals on the top shelf. Boys little older than Arifcame in to giggle

and point; they stood in a row on his display bases. These boys, he thought, they are somebody's son; does nobody cherish and protect them?

It was during the first month of business that Hamid opened the local newspaper and read: 'We are sad to announce the death of Mr Harold Lawson, universally known as Harry to his customers and many friends. For thirty years he was a well-loved sight on the local scene, with the fondly remembered Betty, his pony ...'

Hamid read on. It concluded: 'A modest man, he seldom mentioned his distinguished army record, serving with the King's Rifles in India and being awarded a DSO for his bravery during the Independence Riots. He leaves a widow, Ivy, and will be sorely missed. It can truly be said that "they broke the mould when they made Harry".'

Outside the petals had blown into the gutter, just as they had lain the day Hamid had accompanied the old man into the street two years earlier. It was the slack mid-morning period and Hamid stood in the sunshine, watching the clouds move beyond the TV aerials. For a moment he thought of the earth rolling, and history turning. He himself was fond of poetry, despite his lack of education. What was it Arif used to recite? ' Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes, /And pause awhile from letters to be wise.'

That evening he asked Arif who was the English poet who had written those words. William Shakespeare?

'Dunno.'

Hamid placed his hand on his son's shoulder. 'No, that's "All the world's a stage",' he said. Arifs bones were surprisingly frail. He sat with his eyes on the TV screen where first a house, then a car, burst into flames.

Hamid kept his son's exercise books on a special shelf. He searched through and found the quotation, written in the round, careful writing Arif still had a year or so ago.

'Ah. Samuel Johnson.'
Hamid raised his voice; on the TV a siren wailed. - 'Remember?'
He looked at the title: The Vanity of Human Wishes.
Arif said: 'You're blocking my view.'

1983. Renewed fighting in the Lebanon, and the film Gandhi won eight Oscars. There were fires and floods in Australia and peace people made a human chain around Greenham Common. The future King of England was toddling now, so was Khalid's first-born son in the flat above the Empire Stores. Property was moving again, as the worst of the recession was said to be over, and Hamid converted the upper floors above the newsagent's shop and sold the flats on long leases.

With the profits, and another bank loan, that summer he bought a large detached house for his family, a real family home in that sought-after suburb. Potters Bar.

'I have worked twenty years for this moment,' he said, standing in the lounge. There were fitted carpets throughout28. There was even a bar in panelled walnut, built by the previous owners who had amassed large debts both by drinking and gambling, hence the sale of this house. He pictured his children sitting around the bar, drinking blameless Pepsi.

'This is the proudest moment of my life,' he repeated, his words loud in the empty room. Through its french windows there was a view of the garden, a series of low terraces separated by balustrades. Two small figures in orange anoraks stood on the lawn: his daughters.

Arif, however, was nowhere to be seen. Hamid would have liked him to share this moment but his son had been keeping himself to himself recently, growing more sulky. He had even objected to the move.
'Where will we get the furniture?' said his wife, standing in the middle of the room.

'We'll buy it. Look.' He took out his wallet. It was so fat, it couldn't close.

He found Arif sitting in the car, the radio loud. Hamid turned it down.

'Well, old chap,' he said. 'What do you think?'

'Great,' Arif muttered.

'Earth has not anything to show more fair: ...'

Hamid stood in the garden. The long, blond grass blew in the wind. It was dusk and he looked up at his home, the fortress where he kept his family safe. A light shone from Arifs attic bedroom - he had insisted on this tiny room, no more than a cupboard up in the roof. Down below were the bedrooms; then, below them, the curtained trench windows, glowing bluish from the TV. How solid his house, solid and secure.

Today he wore his tweed suit from Austin Reed. He stood like a squire amidst the swaying weeds. Summer was ending now, and grass choked the flowerbeds. Neither he nor his wife were proficient in gardening, but that did not stop the pride.

It grew darker. To one side of him rose the block of his house. To the other side, beyond the trees, the sky glowed Orange. This side lay London. He thought of his shops casting their own glow over the pavement; he thought of the blood-red neon of THE EMPIRE STORES shining in the night. How ashy those faces seemed, looking up at the window to gaze at the comforts within! Ruined, pasty faces; the losers, the lost, the dispossessed. The walking wounded who once ruled the Empire, pressing their noses against his Empire Stores...

He thought of their squalid comforts: those rows of bottles and those magazines showing bald portions of women's bodies. Here at home, on the other hand, he had a mahogany bookcase filled with English classics, all ;of them bound in leather: Dickens, Shakespeare and the poet he had taken to his own heart: William Wordsworth.

The trees, bulkier now in the night, loomed against the suffused sky. 'Dull would he be of soul who could pass by/A sight so touching in its majesty: ...'

A chill wind rattled the weeds and blew against his legs. He heard the faint thump of music, if you could call it music, from Arifs window. The long, dry grass blew to and fro in the darkness. He realized that he was shivering.

His wife said she was lonely. She sat in the lounge, its new chairs arranged for conversations, and all day she had the TV on. She talked about Lahore; she said she was homesick. She talked about her sisters, and how they had sat all morning laughing and brushing each other's hair. More and more she talked like this.

'Nobody talks to me here,' she said. 'They get into their cars and drive to their tea parties.'

'You must take driving lessons.'

'The car is so big. It frightens me.'

'Then you must have a tea party here.'

She thought about this for some time. Then she said: 'Who should I invite?'

'The neighbours, of course. And then there are the parents of Arifs schoolfriends.'

'But we don't know the parents of Arifs schoolfriends.'

'What about that boy, what's his name, Thompson? His father is an executive with Proctor & Gamble.'

'But what shall I cook for them?'

'And that very pleasant couple next door? We've said good morning often enough, and discussed the state of the hedge.'

So it was arranged. A small party for Sunday tea, so that he himself could be present.

For the next week she was restless; she moved about the house, frowning at the furniture and standing back from it, her head on one side. During one

evening she moved the settee three times. She took Arif down to Marks & Spencers to buy him a new pair of trousers.

'Christ,'said Arif.' It's only a bloody tea party.'

'Don't you dare insult your mother!' Hamid's voice was shrill. He, too, moved the settee one more time.

The question of food was vexing. His wife thought sandwiches and cake most suitable. He himself thought she should produce those titbits in which she excelled: pakoras, brinjal fritters and the daintiest of samosas. Nobody cooked samosas like his Sharine. In the end they compromised. They would have both.

'East meets West,' he joked; his nerves made him high-spirited. He joggled the plaits of Aisha, his youngest daughter; one plait and then the other, and she squealed with pleasure. 'East, West, home's best,' he chanted to her, before she scuttled into the kitchen.

He wanted to tell his family how much he loved them, and how proud he would be to show them off at the tea party. He wanted to tell them how he had stood in the garden, his heart swelling for them. But his daughters would just giggle; his wife would look flustered ... And Arif? He no longer knew what Arif would do. He only knew that he himself would feel foolish.

On the Saturday he went into the stock-room of the Empire Stores and fetched some choice items: chocolate fancies, iced Kunzle cakes. There was little demand from his customers for these high-class items. Only the best would do, however, for those who lived in Potters Bar.

It was a cool, blustery evening. There must be a storm blowing up. Kentucky boxes bowled along the pavement. Further up the street a man stood in a doorway, bellowing. It was an eerie sound, scarcely human. Hamid buttoned up his jacket as he left the shop, carrying his parcels. Far down the street he heard the smash of glass: he clutched the parcels to his chest.

Then it happened. He was just getting into the car. As he did so, he chanced to glance back across the street, towards the parade of shops. It was at that moment that the door of the sauna and massage opened and Arif stepped out.

Within him, Hamid's heart shifted like a rock. He could not move. The face was in shadow; all he could see was the glow of a cigarette. Arif smoking? For some reason this only faintly surprised Hamid.

There the boy stood, a slight figure in that familiar blue and white anorak. He turned to look back at the door; then he turned round and made his way across the road, towards Hamid.

Hamid stood. He opened his mouth to cry out, but nothing happened. Then, as Arifneared him, the street-light fell upon his face.

It was a thinner face; thin, and knowing, and much older than Arif. An unknown, shifty Englishman's face.

Hamid climbed into his car and fumbled with the key. His hands felt damp and boneless. He told himself to stop being ridiculous; he felt a curious sinking, yet swelling sensation, as if he had aged ten years in the last moments.

Driving home, he tried to shake off his unease. After all, it had been a stranger. Nothing to do with his own cherished son. Why then could he not concentrate on the road ahead? He was a level-headed fellow; he always had been.

Sharine was in a state. 'Where have you been?' she cried.

'It's only ten o'clock,' he said, and asked, alarmed: 'What's happened?'

'What's happened? I've spilt the dahl and dropped the sugar and, oh my nerves.'

She was standing in the kitchen. The air was aromatic with cooking.

'The children have been helping?'

'The girls, yes, until I sent them to bed.'

'Arif?' - She shrugged. 'Him, help me?'

'Where is he?'
'Where he always is.'

Hamid walked up the stairs, up past the first landing, then up the narrow flight of stairs to the attic. For some reason he needed to see his son. He knew he would be there, but he needed to see him.

His heart thumped; it must be those stairs, he was no longer as young as he was. Thud, thud, went Arifs music. Hamid knocked on the door.
'What is it?' Arifs voice was sharp, yet muffled.
'It's your father.'
'Wait.'
A few sounds, then Arif opened the door.
'What do you do in there all evening?' asked Hamid. 'Why don't you help your mother? We have a tea party tomorrow.'
Arif shrugged.
'Why don't you answer my questions?' asked Hamid. 'Why?'
A pause. Arif stood behind the half-open door. Outside, the wind rattled against the slates. Finally he said: 'Why are you so interested?'
Hamid stared, 'And what sort of answer is that?'
'Ask yourself.' Arif slowly scratched the spot on his chin. 'If you have the inclination.'
And he slowly closed the door.

That night there was a storm. The window panes clattered and shook; the very house, his fortress, seemed to shudder. In the morning Hamid found that out in the garden some of the balustrade had fallen down. It was made of the most crumbly concrete.

'Charming,' said Mrs Yates. 'Love the wallpaper, awfully daring. And what sweet little girls.'

Tea cups clinked. Sharine, in her silk sari, moved from one guest to another. Her daughters followed her with plates of cakes. Everything was going like clockwork. Looking at the pleasant faces, Hamid felt a flush of satisfaction. It had all been worth it. The years... The work...

'And where's the lad?' Mr Thompson asked, jovially.

'He'll be down,' said Hamid, looking at the door and then at his watch. 'Any minute.' Silently, he urged Arifto hurry up.

Mr Thompson's wife, whose name Hamid unfortunately had not caught, finished her cup of tea and said: 'Would it be frightfully rude if I asked to see the house?'

Mr Thompson laughed. 'Rosemary, you're incorrigible.'

Other guests stood up, too: Mr and Mrs Yates from next door, old Colonel Tindall from down the road, the teenage girls belonging to the widowed lady opposite.

'A guided tour,' joked Hamid, gathering his scattered wits. 'Tickets please.'

Sharine stood in the middle of the lounge, holding the tea pot. She looked alarmed but he gave her a small, reassuring nod. After all, the house was spick and span.

He led the way. Upstairs he pointed out the view from the master bedroom; the bathroom en suite.

'Carpets everywhere!' said Mrs Yates. 'And what an original colour!'

'Must have cost you,' said Mr Thompson, man to man. Hamid nodded modestly, his face hot with pleasure.

'What's up there?' asked Mrs Yates.

'Just the attic,' said Hamid.

But before he could continue, she had mounted the stairs and Mrs Thompson was following her.

'Rosemary!' called Mr Thompson, and turned to Hamid. 'Women!'

Hamid hurried up the stairs. Thud, thud ... the narrow treads shook, he could hear above him the thump of Aril's music, and then he had arrived at the landing and one of the women was pushing open Aril's door.
'May I?' she turned and asked Hamid. But by then she had opened the door.

There are some sights that a person never forgets. Sometime; they rise up again in dreams; in his sleep Hamid saw mottled faces, their skin bleeding, pressed up against the glass of his shop. He saw stumps raised, waving in his face, in those long-forgotten alleys in Lahore. All the wreckage of this world, from which he had tried, so very hard, to protect those he loved.

Through his life, which was a long and prosperous one, he never forgot the sight that met his eyes that Sunday afternoon. Arif, sprawled on the bed, his eyes closed. Arif his own son, snoring as the men snored who lay on the pavements. On the floor lay empty cans of lager and two scattered magazines, their pages open: Mayfair and Penthouse.

Explosions, riots and wreckage all around the turning world. The small hiss of indrawn breath from the two womer who stood beside him.

Learning Activities

LA-1. Skim the story.

1. What is the subject matter of the text under consideration?
2. Where does the story have its setting?
3. What time span is covered ?

LA-2. Scan the text.

1. Sum up the plot.
2. How would you define the composition of the story? What is the role of the description of the historical background against which the narration unfolds?
3. Comment on the title.
4. What problems does the author pose?

5. What is the main idea of the story?

Word Study

WS-1. Find the English equivalents of the following words and word combinations. Reproduce the context in which they are used:

обанкротиться, розничный, крушение, уравновешенный, антенна, экономический спад; распущенный, благоговение, ставить в тупик, оптовый, удвоить оборот, газетный киоск, банковский кредит, ковровое покрытие, «Будь, что будет!»

WS-2. Scan the text and find the following words and word combinations, reproduce the context in which they are used, explain what they mean:

shifty, eerie, blustery, vexing, thump, squalid, sulky, assent, irk, loiter, neglectful, bangle, skip, salubrious, restock, sari, install closed-circuit surveillance, take over.

WS-3.Translate from Russian into English.

1.Он купил дом в престижном месте, отправил Арифа в респектабельную частную школу.

2.Хамид недоумевал, как местные жители могут бездельничать и вести распутный образ жизни.

3.Вскоре Хамид увеличил часы работы магазина, расширил помещение магазина, занимая все новые и новые площади.

4.Затем он переоборудовал помещение, установил камеры видеонаблюдения, антивандальные ставни, установил гриль, удвоил количество стеллажей.

5.Оборот магазина вырос, росла и выручка.

6.Хамид всегда был уравновешенным, рассудительным человеком, инстинктивно чувствовавшим, что было хорошо для бизнеса.

7.Его дом – его крепость – был основательным и надежным.

8.Жалобы и претензии жены раздражали его все больше и больше.

Literary Appreciation

1. Read the scene-setting paragraph. How can you account for the abundance of straightforward characteristics of Hamid's (…a man with business instinct … had standards … a wise shop keeper is prepared to adapt). Correlate the description of the neighbourhood ('…a transient, shabby one') and the phrase 'His aims were not modest, but his beginnings were'. What is Hamid's long-term strategy suggestive of?

2. What proves Hamid has a puritanical streak? Is it affected or sincere? Why does Deborah Moggach emphasize contradiction between his moral principles and laws of business he follows? ('His main income, however, came from the drunks. They raised their ruined faces. Hamid avoided their eyes; he was too well-mannered to flinch… He never offended his wife by describing to her this flotsam and jetsam…)

3. Is Hamid assimilating into the British community? What about his family? What text evidence testifies to it? Why does not he settle in a Pakistani community? 'Flags waved, flicking to and fro, and the crowd roared. **Our** Princess, **his and theirs...**' Comment on the usage of the possessive pronouns. Is Hamid's life strategy typical of most immigrants? Why?

4. What is his attitude to the local British? 'Ruined, pasty faces; the losers, the lost, the dispossessed.' Does the gradation expose his deep contempt? 'Those… who once ruled the Empire, pressing their noses against his Empire Stores... He thought of their squalid comforts: those rows of bottles and those magazines showing bald portions of women's bodies. Here at home, on the other hand, he had a mahogany bookcase filled with English classics, all of them bound in leather: Dickens, Shakespeare and the poet he had taken to his own heart: William Wordsworth'. Do the instances of antithesis convey Hamid's rising superiority? Does wealth always bring about arrogance and snobbery?

5. What imparts philosophical value to Hamid's seemingly insignificant conversation with Mr. Lawson ? ('Times change,' said the old man, Mr Lawson.

The clock whirred, clicked and chimed. He sighed 'Funny old world, isn't it?') Comment on the symbolic nature of Hamid's taking over Lawson's store.

6. What is Hamid's attitude to the emigrants ? On what account are parallels between Islam and Hinduism drawn? ('Islam is a progressive faith. He progressed, removing Mr Gupta's sign and installing THE EMPIRE NEWSAGENTS over the door. He now had one double shop and one single; his properties dominated the parade of shops. Indeed, that week several of his customers joked that he'd soon be taking over the street. Hamid smiled modestly.') How far do Hamid's ambitions go?

7. Why does Deborah Moggach so meticulously, in minutest detail enumerate the innovations Hamid introduced in his shop? What proves he runs his shops efficiently? What motivates Hamid to work that hard? Immigrant's inferiority complex? Responsibility for his dependants? Craving for money? Love of work? Substantiate your choice.

8. Twice throughout the story do we come across the metaphoric phrase 'Hamid's heart swelled'. What were the occasions? What can we infer from them as far as his life priorities are concerned?

9. What causes alienation between Hamid and his wife? Is it inevitable? Why?

10. How can you assess the changes in the relations between Hamid and his son through the instances of dialogue scattered throughout the story ('And have you a hello for your father?' Arif pressed a button. '570,' he said. '680. Dunno.' … Arif said: 'You're blocking my view.') Do you feel sorry for Hamid?

11. What episode vividly and precisely exposes Hamid's concerns about his son? ('His hands felt damp and boneless. He told himself to stop being ridiculous; he felt a curious sinking, yet swelling sensation, as if he had aged ten years in the last moments').

12. What does the repetition 'I'm working **for him**. **For all the family**.' He ran his fingers through his hair. **'For the future.'** His voice rose higher. 'I'm working so that he need never work in a shop! You **understand** me, woman?

Can't you **understand?'** reveal? Do you approve of parents shielding their offspring from hardships?

13. ‘That night there was a storm. The window panes clattered and shook; the very house, his fortress, seemed to shudder. In the morning Hamid found that out in the garden some of the balustrade had fallen down. It was made of the most crumbly concrete’. Does the description of the stormy night give rise to a premonition of coming danger?

14.’He wanted to tell his family how much he loved them, and how proud he would be to show them off at the tea party.’ How does a desire to show off ‘his property’ fit in with moral principles?

15.’He wanted to tell them how he had stood in the garden, his heart swelling for them. But his daughters would just giggle; his wife would look flustered ... And Arif? He no longer knew what Arif would do. He only knew that he himself would feel foolish’. Why is Hamid getting more and more lonely?

16. Is the idyllic description of the tea party ‘Everything was going like clockwork. Looking at the pleasant faces, Hamid felt a flush of satisfaction. It had all been worth it. The years... The work...’ suggestive of frustration of Hamid’s dreams? Why? Is this lull before the storm an effective means to reinforce the suspense?

17. What makes the outcome of the story of impact ?

Discussion Points

1.'East meets West'. Is cross-cultural communication rather doomed to failure?

2. ‘Drunk on the drink he had sold to them. Yesterday they had had record takings.’ Does all the evil you commit rebound on you?

Chemistry

Graham Swift

Graham Swift (born May 4, 1949) is an English author. He was born in London and educated at Dulwich College, London, Queens' College, Cambridge, and later the University of York. Some of his works have been made into films, including “Last Orders” and “Waterland”. “Last Orders” was a joint winner of the 1996 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction and a winner of the Booker Prize in 1996.

Chemistry

Graham Swift

The pond in our park was circular, exposed, perhaps fifty yards across. When the wind blew, little waves travelled across it and slapped the paved edges, like a miniature sea. We would go there, Mother, Grandfather and I, to sail the motor-launch. Grandfather and I made out of plywood, balsawood and varnished paper. We would go even in the winter - especially in the winter, because then we would have the pond to ourselves - when the leaves on the two willows turned yellow and dropped and the water froze your hands. Mother would sit on a wooden bench set back from the perimeter; I would prepare the boat for launching. Grandfather, in his black coat and grey scarf, would walk to the far side to receive it. For some reason it was always Grandfather, never I, who went to the far side. When he reached his station I would hear his ‘Ready!’ across the water. A puff of vapour would rise from his lips like the smoke from a muffled pistol. And I would release the launch. It worked by a battery. Its progress was laboured but its course steady. I would watch it head out to the middle while Mother watched behind me. As it moved it seemed that it followed an actual existing line between Grandfather, myself and Mother, as if Grandfather were pulling us towards him on some invisible cord, and that he had

to do this to prove we were not beyond his reach. When the boat drew near him he would crouch on his haunches. His hands - which I knew were knotted, veiny and mottled from an accident in one of his chemical experiments - would reach out, grasp it and set it on its return.

The voyages were trouble-free. Grandfather improvised a wire grapnel on the end of a length of fishing line in case of shipwrecks or engine failure, but it was never used. Then one day - it must have been soon after Mother met Ralph - we watched the boat, on its first trip across the pond to Grandfather, suddenly become deeper, and deeper in the water. The motor cut. The launch wallowed, sank. Grandfather made several throws with his grapnel and pulled out clumps of green slime. I remember what he said to me, on this, the first loss in my life that I had witnessed. He said, very gravely: 'You must accept it - you can't get it back - it's the only way,' as if he were repeating something to himself. And I remember Mother's face as she got up from the bench to leave. It was very still and very white, as if she had seen something appalling.

It was some months after that that Ralph, who was now a regular guest at weekends, shouted over the table to Grandfather: 'Why don't you leave her alone?!'

I remember it because that same Saturday Grandfather recalled the wreck of my boat, and Ralph said to me, as if pouncing on something: 'How about me buying you a new one? How would you like that?' And I said, just to see his face go crestfallen and blank, 'No!', several times, fiercely. Then as we ate supper Ralph suddenly barked, as Grandfather was talking to Mother: 'Why don't you leave her alone?!'

Grandfather looked at him. 'Leave her alone? What do you know about being left alone?' Then he glanced from Ralph to Mother. And Ralph didn't answer, but his face went tight and his hands clenched on his knife and fork.

And all this was because Grandfather had said to Mother: 'You don't make curry any more, the way you did for Alec, the way Vera taught you.'

It was Grandfather's house we lived in - with Ralph as an ever more permanent lodger. Grandfather and Grandmother had lived in it almost since the day of their marriage. My grandfather had worked for a firm which manufactured gold-and silver-plated articles. My grandmother died suddenly when I was only four; and all I know is that I must have had her looks. My mother said so and so did my father; and Grandfather, without saying anything, would often gaze curiously into my face.

At that time Mother, Father and I lived in a new house some distance from Grandfather's. Grandfather took his wife's death very badly. He needed the company of his daughter and my father; but he refused to leave the house in which my grandmother had lived, and my parents refused to leave theirs. There was bitterness all round, which I scarcely appreciated. Grandfather remained alone in his house, which he ceased to maintain, spending more and more time in his garden shed which he had fitted out for his hobbies of model making and amateur chemistry.

The situation was resolved in a dreadful way: by my own father's death.

He was required now and then to fly to Dublin or Cork in the light aeroplane belonging to the company he worked for which imported Irish goods. One day, in unexceptional weather conditions, the aircraft disappeared without trace into the Irish Sea. In a state which resembled a kind of trance - as if some outside force were all the time directing her - my Mother sold up our house, put away the money for our joint future, and moved in with Grandfather.

My father's death was a far less remote event than my grandmother's, but no more explicable. I was only seven. Mother said, amidst her adult grief: 'He has gone to where Grandma's gone.' I wondered how Grandmother could be at the bottom of the Irish Sea, and at the same time what Father was doing there. I wanted to know when he would return. Perhaps I knew, even as I asked this, that

he never would, that my childish) assumptions were only a way of allaying my own grief. But if I really believed Father was gone for ever - I was wrong.

Perhaps too I was endowed with my father's looks no less than my grandmother's. Because when my mother looked at me she would often break into uncontrollable tears and she would clasp me for long periods without letting go, as if afraid I might turn to air.

I don't know if Grandfather took a secret, vengeful delight in my father's death, or if he was capable of it. But fate had made him and his daughter quits and reconciled them in mutual grief. Their situations were equivalent: she a widow and he a widower. And just as my mother could see in me a vestige of my father, so Grandfather could see in the two of us a vestige of my grandmother.

For about a year we lived quietly, calmly, even contentedly within the scope of this sad symmetry. We scarcely made any contact with the outside world. Grandfather still worked, though his retirement age had passed, and would not let Mother work. He kept Mother and me as he might have kept his own wife and son. Even when he did retire we lived quite comfortably on his pension, some savings and a widow's pension my mother got. Grandfather's health showed signs of weakening - he became rheumatic and sometimes short of breath - but he would still go out to the shed in the garden to conduct his chemical experiments, over which he hummed and chuckled gratefully to himself.

We forgot we were three generations. Grandfather bought Mother bracelets and ear-rings. Mother called me her 'little man'. We lived for each other - and for those two unfaded memories - and for a whole year, a whole harmonious year, we were really quite happy. Until that day in the park when my boat, setting out across the pond towards Grandfather, sank.

Sometimes when Grandfather provoked Ralph I thought Ralph would be quite capable of jumping to his feet, reaching across the table, seizing Grandfather by the throat and choking him. He was a big man, who ate heartily, and I was often afraid he might hit me. But Mother somehow kept him in check. Since Ralph's appearance she had grown neglectful of Grandfather. For example - as Grandfather had pointed out that evening -she would cook the things that Ralph liked (rich, thick stews, but not curry) and forget to produce the meals that Grandfather was fond of. But no matter how neglectful and even hurtful she might be to Grandfather herself, she wouldn't have forgiven someone else's hurting him. It would have been the end of her and Ralph. And no matter how much she might hurt Grandfather - to show her allegiance to Ralph - the truth was she really did want to stick by him. She still needed - she couldn't break free of it - that delicate equilibrium that she, he and I had constructed over the months.

I suppose the question was how far Ralph could tolerate not letting go with Grandfather so as to keep Mother, or how far Mother was prepared to turn against Grandfather so as not to lose Ralph. I remember keeping (a sort of equation in my head: If Ralph hurts Grandfather it means I'm right - he doesn't really care about Mother at all; but if Mother is cruel to Grandfather (though she would only be cruel to him because she couldn't forsake him) it means she really loves Ralph.

But Ralph only went pale and rigid and stared at Grandfather without moving.

Grandfather picked at his stew. We had already finished ours. He deliberately ate slowly to provoke Ralph.

Then Ralph turned to Mother and said: 'For Christ's sake we're not waiting all night for him to finish!' Mother blinked and looked frightened. 'Get the pudding!'

You see, he liked his food.

Mother rose slowly and gathered our plates. She looked at me and said, ‘Come and help’.

In the kitchen she put down the plates and leaned for several seconds, her back towards me, against the draining board. Then she turned. ‘What am I going to do?’ She gripped my shoulders. I remembered these were just the words she’d used once before, very soon after father’s death, and then, too, her face had had the same quivery look of being about to spill over. She pulled me towards her. I had a feeling of being back in that old impregnable domain which Ralph had not yet penetrated. Through the window, half visible in the twilight, the evergreen shrubs which filled our garden were defying the onset of autumn. Only the cherry-laurel bushes were partly denuded - for some reason Grandfather had been picking their leaves. I didn’t know what to do or say - I should have said something - but inside I was starting to form a plan.

Mother took her hands from me and straightened up. Her face was composed again. She took the apple-crumble from the oven. Burnt sugar and apple juice seethed for a moment on the edge of the dish. She handed me the bowl of custard. We strode, resolutely, back to the table. I thought: now we are going to face Ralph, now we are going to show our solidarity. Then she put down the crumble, began spooning out helpings and said to Grandfather, who was still tackling his stew: ‘You’re ruining our meal - do you want to take yours out to your shed?!’

Grandfather’s shed was more than just a shed. Built of brick in one corner of the high walls surrounding the garden, it was large enough to accommodate a stove, a sink, an old armchair, as well as Grandfather’s work-benches and apparatus, and to serve - as it was serving Grandfather more and more - as a miniature home.

I was always wary of entering it. It seemed to me, even before Ralph, even when Grandfather and I constructed the model launch, that it was somewhere

where Grandfather went to be alone, undisturbed, to commune perhaps, in some obscure way, with my dead grandmother. But that evening I did not hesitate. I walked along the path by the ivy-clad garden wall. It seemed that his invitation, his loneliness were written in a form only I could read on the dark green door. And when I opened it he said: 'I thought you would come.'

I don't think Grandfather practised chemistry for any particular reason. He studied it from curiosity and for solace, as some people study the structure of cells under a microscope or watch the changing formation of clouds. In those weeks after Mother drove him out I learnt from Grandfather the fundamentals of chemistry.

I felt safe in his shed. The house where Ralph now lorded it, tucking into bigger and bigger meals, was a menacing place. The shed was another, a sealed-off world. It had a salty, mineral, inhuman smell. Grandfather's flasks, tubes and retort stands would be spread over his work-bench. His chemicals were acquired through connections in the metal-plating trade. The stove would be lit in the corner. Beside it would be his meal tray - for, to shame Mother, Grandfather had taken to eating his meals regularly in the shed. A single electric light bulb hung from a beam in the roof. A gas cylinder fed his bunsen. On one wall was a glass fronted cupboard in which he grew alum and copper sulphate crystals.

I would watch Grandfather's experiments. I would ask him to explain what he was doing and to name the contents of his various bottles.

And Grandfather wasn't the same person, in his shed as he was in me house - sour and cantankerous. He was a weary, ailing man who winced now and then because of his rheumatism and spoke with quiet self-absorption.

'What are you making, Grandpa?'

'Not making - changing. Chemistry is the science of change. You don't make things in chemistry - you change them. Anything can change.'

He demonstrated the point by dissolving marble chips in nitric acid. I watched fascinated.

But he went on: ‘Anything can change. Even gold can change.’

He poured a little of the nitric acid into a beaker, then took another jar of colourless liquid and added some of its contents to the nitric acid. He stirred the mixture with a glass rod and heated it gently. Some brown fumes came off.

‘Hydrochloric acid and nitric acid. Neither would work by itself, but the mixture will.’

Lying on the bench was a pocket watch with a gold chain. I knew it had been given to Grandfather long ago by my grandmother. He unclipped the chain from the watch, then, leaning forward against the bench, he held it between two fingers over the beaker. The chain swung. He eyed me as if he were waiting for me to give some sign. Then he drew the chain away from the beaker.

‘You’ll have to take my word for it, eh?’

He picked up the watch and reattached it to the chain.

‘My old job - gold-plating. We used to take real gold and change it. Then we’d take something that wasn’t gold at all and cover it with this changed gold so it looked as if it was all ‘gold - but it wasn’t.’

He smiled bitterly.

‘What are we going to do?’

‘Grandpa?’

‘People change too, don’t they?’

He came close to me. I was barely ten. I looked at him without speaking.

‘Don’t they?’

He stared fixedly into my eyes, the way I remembered him doing after Grandmother’s death.

‘They change. But the elements don’t change. Do you know what an element is? Gold’s an element. We turned it from one form into another, but we didn’t make any gold - or lose any.’

Then I Then I had a strange sensation. It seemed to me that Grandfather's face before me was only a cross section from some infinite stick of rock, from which, at the right point, Mother's face and mine might also be cut. I thought: every face is like this. I had a sudden giddying feeling that there is no end to anything. I wanted to be told simple, precise facts.

'What's that, Grandpa?'

'Hydrochloric acid.'

'And that?'

'Green vitriol.'

'And that?' I pointed to another, unlabelled jar of clear liquid, which stood at the end of the bench, attached to a complex piece of apparatus.

'Laurel water. Prussic acid.' He smiled. 'Not for drinking.'

All that autumn was exceptionally cold. The evenings were chill and full of the rustlings of leaves. When I returned to the house from taking out Grandfather's meal tray (this had become my duty) I would observe Mother and Ralph in the living room through the open kitchen hatchway. They would drink a lot from the bottles of whisky and vodka which Ralph brought in and which at first Mother made a show of disapproving. The drink made Mother go soft and heavy and blurred and it made Ralph gain in authority. They would slump together on the sofa. One night I watched Ralph pull Mother towards him and hold her in his arms, his big lurching frame almost enveloping her, and Mother saw me, over Ralph's shoulder, watching from the hatchway. She looked trapped and helpless.

And that was the night that I got my chance - when I went to collect Grandfather's tray. When I entered the shed he was asleep in his chair, his plates, barely touched, on the tray at his feet. In his slumber - his hair dishevelled, mouth open - he looked like some torpid, captive animal that has lost even the will to eat. I had taken an empty spice jar from the kitchen. I took

the glass bottle labelled HNO and poured some of its contents, carefully, into the spice jar. Then I picked up Grandfather's tray, placed the spice jar beside the plates and carried the tray to the house.

I thought I would throw the acid in Ralph's face at breakfast. I didn't want to kill him. It would have been pointless to kill him - since death is a deceptive business. I wanted to spoil his face so Mother would no longer want him. I took the spice jar to my room and hid it in my bedside cupboard. In the morning I would smuggle it down in my trouser pocket. I would wait, pick my moment. Under the table I would remove the stopper. As Ralph gobbled down his eggs and fried bread...

I thought I would not be able to sleep. From my bedroom window I could see the dark square of the garden and the little patch of light cast from the window of Grandfather's shed. Often I could not sleep until I had seen that patch of light disappear and I knew that Grandfather had shuffled back to the house and slipped in, like a stray cat, at the back door.

But I must have slept that night, for I do not remember seeing Grandfather's light go out or hearing his steps on the garden path.

That night Father came to my bedroom. I knew it was him. His hair and clothes were wet, his lips were caked with salt; sea-weed hung from his shoulders. He came and stood by my bed. Where he trod, pools of water formed on the carpet and slowly oozed outwards. For a long time he looked at me. Then he said: 'It was her. She made a hole in the bottom of the boat, not big enough to notice, so it would sink - so you and Grandfather would watch it sink. The boat sank - like my plane.' He gestured to his dripping clothes and encrusted lips. 'Don't you believe me?' He held out a hand to me but I was afraid to take it. 'Don't you believe me? Don't you believe me?' And as he repeated this he walked slowly backwards towards the door, as if something were pulling him,

the pools of water at his feet drying instantly. And it was only when he had disappeared that I managed to speak and said: 'Yes. I believe you. I'll prove it.'

And then it was almost light and rain was dashing against the window as if the house were plunging under water and a strange, small voice was calling from the front of the house -'but it wasn't Father's voice. I got up, walked out onto the landing and peered through the landing window. The voice was a voice on the radio inside an ambulance which was parked with its doors open by the pavement. The heavy rain and the tossing branches of rowan tree obscured my view, but I saw the two men in uniform carrying out the stretcher with a blanket draped over it Ralph was with them. He was wearing his dressing gown and pyjamas and slippers over bare feet, and he carried an umbrella. He fussed around the ambulance men like an overseer directing the loading of some vital piece of cargo. He called something to Mother who must have been standing below, out of sight at the front door. I ran back across the landing. I wanted to get the acid. But then Mother came up the stairs. She was wearing her dressing gown. She caught me in her arms. I smelt whisky. She said: ‘Darling. Please, I’ll explain. Darling’.

But she never did explain. All her life since then, I think, she has been trying to explain, or to avoid explaining. She only said: ‘Grandpa was old and ill, he wouldn’t have lived much longer anyway.’ And there was the official verdict: suicide by swallowing prussic acid. But all the other things that should have been explained - or confessed - she never did explain.

And she wore, beneath everything, this look of relief, as if she had recovered from an illness. Only a week after Grandfather’s funeral she went into Grandfather’s bedroom and flung wide the windows. It was a brilliant, crisp late November day and the leaves on the rowan tree were all gold. And she said: ‘There - isn’t that lovely?’

The day of Grandfather's funeral had been such a day hard, dazzling, spangled with early frost and gold leaves. We stood at the ceremony, Mother, Ralph and I, like a mock version of the trio - Grandfather, Mother and I - who had once stood at my father's memorial service. Mother did not cry. She had not cried at all, even in the days before the funeral when the policemen and the officials from the coroner's court came, writing down their statements, apologising for their intrusion and asking their questions.

They did not address their questions to me. Mother said. 'He's only ten, what can he know?' Though there were a thousand things I wanted to tell them - about how Mother banished Grandfather, about how suicide can be murder and how things don't end - which made me feel that I was somehow under suspicion. I took the jar of acid from my bedroom, went to the park and threw it in the pond.

And then after the funeral, after the policemen and officials had gone, Mother and Ralph began to clear out the house and to remove the things from the shed. They tidied the overgrown parts of the garden and clipped back the trees. Ralph wore an old sweater which was far too small for him and I recognised it as one of Father's. And Mother said: 'We're going to move to a new house soon - Ralph's buying it.'

I had nowhere to go. I went down to the park and stood by the pond. Dead willow leaves floated on it. Beneath its surface was a bottle of acid and the wreck of my launch. But though things change they aren't destroyed. It was there, by the pond, when dusk was gathering and it was almost time for the park gates to be locked, as I looked to the centre where my launch sank, then up again to the far side, that I saw him. He was standing in his black overcoat and his grey scarf. The air was very cold and little waves were running across the water. He was smiling, and I knew: the launch was still travelling over to him, unstoppable, unsinkable, along that invisible line. And his hands, his acid-marked hands, would reach out to receive it.

Learning Activities

LA-1. Skim the text.

1. Who are the main characters?
2. What problems does the author raise?
3. What is your impression of the story?

LA-2. Scan the text.

1. What type of the text does it represent? What is the effect of the first-person narrative?
2. What does the fact that the narrator is a nine-year-old boy contribute to your impressions of the text? Is there any difference between a child's and an adult's perception of the events?
3. It is a prediction kind of story, isn't it? Why?
4. What is the composition of the story? How can you account for the usage of blanks (are they stylistically relevant? if yes, why?). What effect does it produce?
5. Comment on the title.
6. What are the basic parallels of the story?

Word Study

WS-1. Find the English equivalents for the following words and word combinations. Reproduce the context in which they are used:
исчезнуть без следа (2), вырваться на свободу, выбрать момент, проявлять солидарность, властвовать над кем-то, быть вне досягаемости, иметь вид, плененный/находящийся в неволе.

WS-2. Scan the text and find the following words and word combinations, reproduce the context in which they are used, explain what they mean:
to allay one's grief, to keep smb in check, to grow neglectful of smb, to gain in authority, solace, to take delight in smth, to be quits with smb, to be wary of

doing smth, to see a vestige of smb in smb, to show allegiance to smb, to reconcile in mutual grief.

WS-3. Give synonyms to the following words and word combinations:

to have smb's looks, to equip smth, to converse, balance, tired, false/fake.

Literary Appreciation

1. In the scene-setting paragraph the author gives a detailed description of the motor-launch. The end of the story is framed with the same episode. Why does the author give it so much prominence?
2. Any family is a unity with close ties between its members. Explain the sentence: "As it moved it seemed that it followed an actual existing line between Grandfather, myself and Mother, as if Grandfather were pulling us towards him on some invisible cord…".
3. What premonition does the sinking of the boat bring? Why does the Mother's face get "very still and very white, as if she had seen something appalling". How does the Grandfather teach the boy to accept the losses?
4. Why does the narrator put two events – the wreck of the boat and the appearance of Ralph in their life – together?
5. What does the boat symbolize? Are there any other symbols and recurring images?
6. How do the relationships between the Grandfather and the Mother change? What does Ralph have to do with it?
7. One of the manifestations of close ties in a family is family likeness. The author makes a lot of reference to it in the story. Find examples and comment on the stylistic devices employed.
8. Both the Grandfather and the Mother took their losses very badly. Prove it. For example, the Mother moved "in a state which resembled a kind of trance – as if some outside force were all the time directing her…" What means does the author make use of to emphasize the pain and despair of the woman?

9. How did the boy take the explanation of the Father's death by the Mother?

10. Being united by mutual grief, the family began to live "quietly, calmly, even contentedly within the scope of this sad symmetry". What symmetry does the author imply? Why is it sad? Describe their life after their two losses. The boy calls it metaphorically a "delicate equilibrium". Expand on it. Another example: "We lived for each other – and for those two unfaded memories – and for a whole year, a whole harmonious year, we were really quite happy".

11. Does the Mother find it difficult to break free of the Grandfather? Why does she have a "quivery look of being about to spill over" once at dinner. Why does she side with Ralph and send the Grandfather to the shed in this episode? What is this "old impregnable domain" which Ralph hasn't yet penetrated?

12. The shed where the Grandfather is exiled is more than just a shed. It is "another, sealed-off world". Why? How does the Grandfather spend his time there? The boy used to be wary of entering it but that evening he goes there. Why? Is it the Grandfather's loneliness calling for the boy? The author expresses it figuratively in the sentence: "It seemed that his invitation, his loneliness were written in a form only I could read on the dark green door". Comment on it.

13. How would you account for the different Grandfather in the house and in the shed? What epithets does the author resort to to create the contrast?

14. What is the parallel between chemistry as the science of change and people according to the Grandfather?

15. The resemblance between the boy, the Mother and the Grandfather drives the boy to a "sudden giddying feeling that there is no end to anything". How do you understand this strange sensation?

16. Why does the Mother seem to the boy "trapped and helpless" when he sees her with Ralph one night drinking alcohol together as many other nights before?

17. Do you sympathize with the Grandfather? Why? Does the author (or the narrator) deliberately describe him with more sympathy and compassion? Find evidence of that in the text. For example, comment on the sentence: "…he looked like some torpid, captive animal that has lost even the will to eat".

18. What is the meaning of the boy's dream one night? Who does he see? What does his Father say? Comment on his words. What does the boy want "to prove"?

19. What happens the night the Father comes to the boy? Why does the Mother keep repeating "Darling. Please, I'll explain. Darling, darling". What does the Mother have "to explain"? Does she ever?

20. What is the official verdict of the Grandfather's death? Does the boy agree? How can suicide be murder?

21. How does the Mother take the death of the Grandfather? She looks relieved, doesn't she? Prove it.

22. The boy calls his new family "a mock version of the trio – Grandfather, Mother and I". Ralph has replaced the Grandfather. What emotions do you feel here? What does it mean?

23. The end of the story carries a lot of weight and meaning. It makes the total impression less tragic, more optimistic. Do you agree? The launch will always travel to the boy, "unstoppable, unsinkable, along that invisible line". This is a very strong and positive image, isn't it? What impression do you gather?

Discussion Points

1. The grandfather's idea of how one must face losses in life is expressed in the following phrase: "You must accept it – you can't get it back – it's the only way." How far do you agree?

2. Death is a deceptive business.

3. Though things change, they are not destroyed.

4. People change but the elements don't.

A Shooting Season

Rose Tremain

Rose Tremain (born Rosemary Jane Thomson on August 2, 1943) is an English writer. She attended Crofton Grange School from 1954 to 1961; the Sorbonne from 1961–1962; and graduated from the University of East Anglia in 1965, where she taught creative writing from 1988 to 1995.

She married Jon Tremain in 1971 and they had one daughter, Eleanor, born in 1972, who became an actress. The marriage lasted about five years. Her second marriage, to theatre director Jonathan Dudley, in 1982, lasted about nine years; and she has been with Richard Holmes since 1992. She lives in Norfolk.

Her novel “Music and Silence” won the best novel in the 1999 Whitbread Awards, building on the recognition she received in the award of the 1989 Sunday Express Book of the Year for her novel “Restoration”, and the 1992 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for “Sacred Country”.

A Shooting Season

Rose Tremain

‘You’re writing a *what*?’

‘A novel.’

Looking away from him, nervously touching her hair, Anna remembered, the last time I saw him my hair wasn’t grey.

‘Why the hell are you writing a novel?’

Grey hairs had sprouted at forty-one. Now, at forty-five, she sometimes thought, my scalp is exhausted, that’s all, like poor soil.

‘I’ve wanted to write a novel ever since I was thirty. Long before, even...’

‘You never told me.’

‘No. Of course not.’

‘Why “of course not”?’

'You would have laughed, as you're laughing now.'

Anna had always been enchanted by his laugh. It was a boy's giggle; (you climbed a cold dormitory stairway and heard it bubble and burst behind a drab door!) yet their son didn't have it: at sixteen, he had the laugh of a rowdy man.

'I don't approve.'

'No.'

'It's an act of postponed jealousy.'

Well, if so, then long postponed. Six years since their separation; four since the divorce and his remarriage to Susan, the pert blonde girl who typed his poems. And it wasn't jealousy, surely? In learning to live without him, she had taught herself to forget him utterly. If she heard him talk on the radio, she found herself thinking, his cadences are echoing Dylan Thomas these days; he's remembered how useful it is, if you happen to be a poet, also to be Welsh. Three years older her, he had come to resemble a Welsh hillside - craggy outcrop of a man, unbuttoned to weather and fortune, hair wiry as gorse. Marcus. Fame clung to his untidy look. No doubt, she thought, he's as unfaithful to Susan as he was to me.

'How did it start?'

The novel-writing, he meant, but he had a way, still, of sending fine ripples through the water of ordinary questions which invited her to admit: I was in love with him for such a long time that parting from him was like a drowning. When I was washed ashore, the sediment of him still clogged me.

'I found there were things I wanted to say.'

'Oh, there always were!'

'Yes, but stronger now. Before I get old and start forgetting.'

'But a *novel?'*

'Why not?'

'You were never ambitious.'

No. Not when she was his: Mrs Marcus Ridley, wife of the poet. Not while she bore his children and made rags while he wrote and they slept.

‘Do your pockets still have bits of sand in them?’

He laughed, took her strong wrist and held her hand to his face. ‘I don’t know. No one empties them for me.’

Anna had been at the rented cottage for three weeks. A sluggish river flowed a few yards from it: mallard and. moorhen were the companions of her silence, the light of early morning was silver. In this temporary isolation, she had moved contentedly in her summer sandals, setting up a work table in the sunshine, another indoors by the open fire. Her novel crept to a beginning, then began to flow quietly like the river. She celebrated each day’s work with two glasses, sometimes more, of the home-made wine she had remembered to bring with her. She slept well with the window wide open on the Norfolk sky. She dreamed of her book finished and bound. Then one morning Margaret, her partner in her craft business telephoned. The sound of the telephone ringing was so unfamiliar that it frightened her. She remembered her children left on their own in London; she raced to answer the unforeseen but now obvious emergency. But no, said Margaret, no emergency, only Marcus.

‘Marcus?’

‘Yes. Drunk and full of his songs. Said he needed to see you.”

‘And you told him where I was?’

‘Yes.He said if I didn’t, he’d pee on the pottery shelf.’

’Marcus.’

The rough feel of his face was very familiar; she might have touched it yesterday. She thought suddenly, for all his puerile needs, he’s a man of absolute mystery; I never understood him. Yet they had been together for ten years. The Decade of the Poet she called it, wanting to bury him with formality and

distance. And yet he surfaced in her: she seldom read a book without wondering, how would Marcus have judged that? And then feeling irritated by the question. On such occasions, she would always remind herself: he doesn't even bother to see the children, let alone me. He's got a new family (Evan 4, Lucy 3) and they, now, take all his love - the little there ever was in him to give.

'You look so healthy, Anna. Healthy and strong. I suppose you always were strong.'

'Big-boned, my mother called it.'

'How is your mother?'

'Dead.'

'You never let me know.'

'No. There was no point.'

'I could have come with you - to the funeral or whatever.'

'Oh, Marcus...'

'Funerals are ghastly. I could have helped you through.'

'Why don't you see the children?'

He let her hand drop. He turned to the window, wide open on the now familiar prospect of reed and river. Anna noticed that the faded corduroy jacket he was wearing was stretched tight over his back. He seemed to have outgrown it.

'Marcus...?'

He turned back to her, hands in his pockets.

'No accusations. No bloody accusations!'

Oh yes, she noticed, there's the pattern: I ask a question, Marcus says it's inadmissible, I feel guilty and ashamed...

'It's a perfectly reasonable question.'

'Reasonable? It's a guilt-inducing, jealous, mean-minded question. You know perfectly well why I don't see the children: because I have two newer, younger and infinitely more affectionate children, and these newer, younger and

infinitely more affectionate children are bitterly resented by the aforementioned older, infinitely less affectionate children. And because I am a coward.'

He should be hit, she thought, then noticed that she was smiling.

'I brought some of my home-made wine,' she said, 'it's a disgusting looking yellow, but it tastes rather good. Shall we have some?'

'Home-made wine? I thought you were a businessperson. When the hell do you get time to make wine?'

'Oh Marcus, I have plenty of time.'

Anna went to the cold, pavement-floored little room she had decided to think of as 'the pantry'. Its shelves were absolutely deserted except for five empty Nescafe jars, a dusty goldfish bowl (the debris of another family's Norfolk summer) and her own bottles of wine. It was thirty-five years since she had lived in a house large enough to have a pantry, but now, in this cupboard of a place she could summon memories Hodgson, her grandfather's butler, uncorking Stones ginger beer for her and her brother on timeless summer evenings - the most exquisite moments of all the summer holidays. Then, one summer, she found herself there alone. Hodgson had left. Her brother Charles had been killed at school by a cricket ball. Anna opened a bottle of wine and took it and two glasses out to her table in the garden, where Marcus had installed himself. He was looking critically at her typewriter and at the unfinished pages of her book lying beside it.

'You don't mean to say you're typing it?'

She put the wine and the glasses on the table. She noticed that the heavy flint she used as a paperweight had been moved. 'Please don't let the pages blow away, Marcus.'

'I'm sure it's a mistake to type thoughts directly onto paper. Writing words by hand is part of the process.'

'Your process.'

'I don't know any writers who type directly.'

‘You know me. Please put the stone back, Marcus.’

He replaced the pages he had taken up, put the flint down gently and spread his wide hand over it. He was looking at her face.

‘Don’t write about me, Anna, will you?’

She poured the wine. The sun touched her neck and she remembered its warmth with pleasure.

‘Don’t make me the villain.’

‘There is no villain.’

She handed him his glass of wine. Out in the sunshine, he looked pale beside her. A miraculous three weeks of fine weather had tanned her face, neck and arms, whereas he...how did he spend his days now? She didn’t know. He looked as if he’d been locked up. Yet he lived in the country with his new brood. She it was - and their children - who had stayed on in the London flat.

‘How’s Susan?’

No. She didn’t want to ask. Shouldn’t have asked. She’d only asked in order to get it over with: to sweep Susan and his domestic life to the back of her mind, so that she could let herself be nice to him, let herself enjoy him.

‘Why ask?’

’To get it over with!’

He smiled. She thought she sensed his boyish laughter about to surface.

‘Susan’s got a lover.’

Oh damn him! Damn Marcus! Feeling hurt, feeling cheated, he thought I’d be easy consolation. No wonder the novel annoys him; he sees the ground shifting under him, sees a time when he’s not the adored, successful granite he always thought he was.

‘Damn the lover.’

‘What?’

He’d looked up at her, startled. What he remembered most vividly about her was her permanence. The splash of bright homespun colour that was Anna: he had

only to turn his head, open a door, to find her there. No other wife or mistress had been like her; these had often been absent when he'd searched for them hardest. But Anna: Anna had always *wanted* to be there.

I'm not very interested in Susan's lover.'

'No. He isn't interesting. He's a chartered surveyor.'

'Ah. Well, reliable probably.'

'D'you think so? Reliable, are they, as a breed? He looks pitiful enough to be it. Perhaps that's what she wants.'

'And you?'

"Me?'

'What do you want, Marcus? Did you come here just to tell me your wife had a lover?'

'Accusations again. All the bloody little peeves!'

'I want to know why you came here.'

'So do I.'

'What?'

'So do 1 want to know. All I know is that I wanted to see you. If that's not good enough for you, I'll go away.'

Further along the river, she could hear the mallard quacking. Some evenings at sunset, she had walked through the reeds to find them (two pairs, one pair with young) and throw in scraps for them. Standing alone, the willows in front of her in perfect silhouette, she envied the ducks their sociability. No one comes near them, she thought, only me standing still. Yet they have everything - everyone - they need.

'I love it here.'

She had wanted to sit down opposite Marcus with her glass of wine, but he had taken the only chair. She squatted, lifting her face to *the* sun. She knew he was watching her.

'Do you want me to go away?'

She felt the intermittent river breeze on her face, heard the pages of her novel flap under the stone. She examined his question, knew that it confused her, and set it aside.

'The novel's going to be about Charlie.'

'Charlie?'

'My brother Charles. Who died at school that he lived on, but not as him, as a girl.'

'Why as a girl?'

'I thought I would understand him better as a girl.'

'Will it work?'

'The novel?'

'Giving Charlie tits.'

'Yes, I think so. It also means she doesn't have cricket and risk being killed.'

'I'd forgotten Charlie.'

'You never knew him.'

'I knew him as a boy - through your memories. He of Hodgson's ginger beer larder!'

'Pantry.'

She's got stronger, Marcus decided. She's gone grey and it suits her. And she's still wearing her bright colours. Probably makes not just her own clothes now, but ponchos and smocks and bits of batik to sell in her shops. And of course her son's friends fall in love with her. She's perfect for a boy: bony, maternal and sexy. Probably her son's in love with her too.

'Can I stay for dinner?'

Anna put her glass to her lips and drained it. He always, she thought, made requests sound like offers. Anna scrutinised the contents of the small fridge: milk, butter, a bunch of weary radishes, eggs. Alone, she would have made do with the radishes and an omelette, but Marcus had a lion's appetite. His most potent memory of a poetry-reading fortnight in America was ordering steak for

breakfast. He had returned looking ruddy, like the meat. Anna sighed. The novel had been going well that morning. Charlie, renamed Charlotte, was perched high now above her cloistered schooldays on the windswept catwalk of a new university. Little gusts of middle-class guilt had begun to pick at her well-made clothes and at her heart. She was ready for change.

'Charlotte can wait,' Marcus told Anna, after her one feeble attempt to send him away. 'She'll be there tomorrow and I'll be gone. And anyway, we owe it to each other - one dinner.'

I owe nothing, Anna thought. No one (especially not pretty Susan with her tumbling fair hair and her flirtatious eyes) could have given herself - her time, her energy, her love - more completely to one man than she to Marcus. For ten years he had been the landscape that held her whole existence - one scarlet poppy on the hills and crags of him, sharing his sky.

'One dinner!'

She took the car into Wroxham, bought good dark fillet, two bottles of Beaujolais, new potatoes, a salad and cheese. While she was gone, he sat at the table in the sunshine, getting accustomed to the gently scented taste of her home made wine and, despite a promise not to, reading her novel Her writing bored him after a very few pages; he needed her presence, not her thoughts.

I've cried for you, he wanted to tell her. There have been times when - yes, several of them - times when I haven't felt comfortable with the finality of our separation, times when I've thought, there's more yet, I need more. And why couldn't you be part of my life again, on its edge? I would honestly feel troubled less - by Susan's chartered surveyor, by the coming of my forty-ninth birthday - yes, much less, if you were there in your hessian or whatever it is you wear and I could touch you. Because ten years is, after all, a large chunk of our lives, and though I never admit it, I now believe that my best poems were written during those ten and what followed has been mainly repetition. And I wanted to ask

you, where are those rugs you made while I worked? Did you chuck them out? Why was the silent making of your rugs so intimately connected to my perfect arrangement of words?

‘So here we are...’
The evening promised to be so warm that Anna had put a cloth on the table outside and laid it for supper. Marcus had helped her prepare the food and now they sat facing the sunset, watching the colour go first from the river, then from the willows and poplars behind it.
‘Remember Yugoslavia?’
‘Yes, Marcus.’
‘Montenegro.’
‘Yes.’
“Those blue thistles.’
‘Umm.’
‘Our picnic suppers!’
‘Stale bread.’
‘What?’
“The bread in Yugoslavia always tasted stale.’
‘We used to make love in a sleeping bag.’
‘Yes.’
Anna thought, it will soon be so dark, I won’t be able to see him clearly, just as, in my mind, I have only the most indistinct perception of how he *is* in that hard skin, if I ever knew. For a moment she considered going indoors to get a candle, but decided it would be a waste of time; the breeze would blow it out. And the darkness suits us, suits this odd meeting, she thought. In it, we’re insubstantial; we’re each imagining the other one, that’s all.
‘I read the novel, as far as you’ve gone.’
‘Yes. I thought you probably would.’

’I never pictured you writing.’

‘No. Well, I never pictured you arriving here. Margaret told me you said you “needed” me. What on earth did you mean?’

‘I think about you - often.’

‘Since Susan found her surveyor?’

‘That’s not fair.’

‘Yes, it’s fair. You could have come to see me - and the children - any time you wanted.’

‘I wanted...’

‘What?’

‘Not the children. You.’

For a moment, Anna allowed herself to remember: ‘You, in the valley of my arms, /my quaint companion on the mountain. How wisely did I gather you, my crimson bride... Then she took a sip of beaujolais and began:

‘I’ve tried.’

‘What?’

‘To love other people. Other men, I mean.’

‘And?’

‘The feelings don’t seem to last. Or perhaps I’ve just been unlucky.’

‘Yes. You deserve someone.’

‘I don’t want anyone, Marcus. This is what I’ve at last understood. I have the children and the craft shops and one or two men friends to go out with, and now I have the novel...’

‘I miss you, Anna.’

She rested her chin on folded hands and looked at him. Mighty is a perfect word, she thought. To me, he has always seemed mighty. And when he left me, every room, every place I went to was full of empty space. Only recently had I got used to it, decided finally to stop trying to fill it up. And now there he is again, his enormous shadow, darker, nearer than the darkness.

‘You see, I’m not a poet any more.’

‘Yes, you are, Marcus. I read your new volume...’

‘No I’m not. I won’t write anything more of value.’

‘Why?’

’Because I’m floundering, Anna. I don’t know what I expect of myself any more, as a poet or as a man. Susan’s destroying me.’

‘Oh rot! Susan was exactly the woman you dreamed of.’

‘And now I have dreams of you.’

Anna sighed and let Marcus hear the sigh. She got up and walked the few yards to the river and watched it shine at her feet. For the first time that day, the breeze made her shiver.

Light came early. Anna woke astonished and afraid. Marcus lay on his stomach, head turned away from her, his right arm resting down the length of her body.

A noise had woken her, she knew, yet there was nothing: only the sleeper’s breath next to her and the birds tuning up, like a tiny hidden orchestra, for their full-throated day. Then she heard them: two shots, then a third and a fourth. Marcus turned over, opened his eyes and looked at her. She was sitting up and staring blankly at the open window. The thin curtains moved on a sunless morning.

‘Anna...’

The strong hand on her arm wanted to tug her gently down, but she resisted its pressure, stayed still, chin against her knees.

‘Someone’s shooting.’

‘Come back to sleep.’

‘No, I can’t. Why would someone be shooting?’

‘The whole world’s shooting!’

‘I must go and see.’

Marcus lay still and watched Anna get up. As she pulled on a faded, familiar gown, both had the same thought: it was always like this, Anna getting up first, Marcus in bed half asleep, yet often watching Anna.

'What are you going to do?'

'I don't know. But I have to see.'

The morning air was chilly. It was sunless, Anna realised, only because the sun had not yet risen. A mist squatted above the river; the landscape was flattened and obscured in dull white. Anna stared. The dawn has extraordinary purpose, she thought, everything contained, everything shrouded by the light but emerging minute by minute into brightness and shape, so that while I stand still it all changes. She began to walk along the river. The ground under her sandals was damp and the leather soon became slippery. Nothing moved. The familiar breeze had almost died in the darkness, the willow leaves hung limp and wet. Anna stopped, rubbed her eyes.

'Where are you?'

She waited, peering into the mist. The mist was yellowing, sunlight slowly climbing. A dog barked, far off.

'Where are you?'

Senseless question. Where are you? Where are you? Anna walked on. The surface of the water, so near her slippery feet, was absolutely smooth. The sun was climbing fast now and the mist was tumbling, separating, making way for colour and contour. Where *are you! The three* words came echoing down the years. Anna closed her eyes. They came and shot the ducks, she told herself calmly. That's all. Men came with guns and had a duck shot and the mallard are gone. When I come down here with my scraps, I won't find them. But that's all. The river flows on. Everything else is just as it was yesterday and the day before and, the day before that. I am still Anna. Birds don't matter. I have a book to write. And the sun's coming up...

She was weeping. Clutching her arms inside the sleeves of the faded gown, she walks from room to room in the empty flat. Where are you! London dawn at the grimed net curtains... fruit still in the bowl from which, as he finally went, he stole an orange...nothing changes and yet everything...his smell still on her body... And where am I? Snivelling[9] round the debris of you in all the familiar rooms, touching surfaces you touched, taking an orange from the bowl... Where am I? Weeping. The ducks don't matter. Do they? Keeping hold on what is, on what exists *after* the shot has echoed and gone, this is all that's important, yes, keeping hold on what T have_forced myself to become, with all the sanding and polishing of hardness, keeping hold of my life alone that nothing - surely not the wounds of one night's loving? can destroy. So just let me wipe my face on the same washed-out corner of a sleeve. And forget. A stranger carries the dead mallard home, dead smeared heads, bound together with twine. But the sun comes up on the same stretch of river where, only yesterday, they had life...

Marcus held Anna. They stood by his car. It was still morning, yet they sensed the tiredness in each other, as if neither had slept at all. I'll be going then, old thing. Sorry I was such a miserable bugger. Selfish of me to disturb you with my little problems.'

'Oh, you weren't disturbing me.'

'Yes, I was. Typical of me: Marcus Ridley's Lament for Things as They Are.'

'I don't mind. And last night -'

'Lovely, Anna. Perhaps I'll stop dreaming about you now.'

'Yes.'

He kissed her cheek and got quickly into the car.

'Good luck with the novel.'

'Oh yes. Thank you, Marcus.'

'I'll picture you working by your river.'

'Come and see the children, Marcus. Please come and see the children.'

‘Yes. Alright. No promises. Are you going to work on the book today?’

‘No, I don’t think I can. Not today.’

‘Poor Anna. I’ve tired you. Never mind. There’s always tomorrow.’

‘Yes, Marcus,’ and very gently she reached out and touched his face, ‘there’s always tomorrow.’

Learning Activities

LA-1. Skim the story.

1. Where is the story set?
2. What is the relationship between the main characters?
3. What mood does the story create?

LA-2. Scan the text.

1. Give the plot of the story in 3-5 sentences.
2. What is the composition of the story? What is the role of fragmentary narration?
3. What problems does the author raise in the story?
4. Account for the title of the story. Why is the indefinite article used?
5. Is the story autobiographical? What personal experience of Rose Tremain is reflected in the story?
6. What are the language peculiarities of the story?
7. Formulate the main idea of the story.

Word Study

WS-1. Find the English equivalents for the following words and word combinations. Reproduce the context in which they are used:

шумный/буйный/хулиган, проявляться в, вызывающий чувство вины, выводок/семья/дети, обойтись чем-то.

WS-2. Scan the text and find the following words and word combinations, reproduce the context in which they are used, explain what they mean:

to clog, debris, to get it over with, to have a lion's appetite, to flounder.

WS-3. Give synonyms to the following words and word combinations:

impudent, rough/rugged, slow-moving/inactive, unacceptable, uneven/spasmodic.

Literary Appreciation

1. The story starts with a conversation between Marcus and Anna. Is it a friendly one? Comment on Marcus's question "You are writing a *what*?" What does it say about his attitude to Anna? How does he treat her? Does the author approve of it?

2. Why did Anna rent a cottage in the country? She was happy there before Marcus came, wasn't she? What text evidence testifies to it?

3. Comment on the following: "Yet they had been together for ten years. The Decade of the Poet she called it, wanting to bury him with formality and distance. And yet he surfaced in her: she seldom read a book without wondering, how would Marcus have judged that?" Find in the text and quote more lines expressing Anna's attitude to Marcus. How does it characterize her?

4. How did Anna feel when they separated? Why? Comment on the following sense and style-wise: 1) "I was in love with him for such a long time that parting from him was like a drowning. When I was washed ashore, the sediment of him still clogged me"; 2) "For ten years he had been the landscape that held her whole existence – one scarlet poppy on the hills and crags of him, sharing his sky."

5. Is Marcus a loving and caring father? How does he react to Anna's question about the children? What reasons does he give for not coming to see them? How does it characterize him?

6. Why do you think Marcus asks Anna not to write about him in her novel?

7. Why has Marcus come to visit Anna? Comment on the following: "…he sees the ground shifting under him, sees a time when he is not adored, successful granite he always thought he was." What does he expect from her?

8. What did she mean to him in the past? What does he remember about her? Does she seem to have changed?

9. Comment on Marcus's words: "We owe it to each other – one dinner." Is Anna of the same opinion? Why do you think she lets him stay?

10. Expand on the following: "He needed her presence, not her thoughts".

11. What do they discuss at dinner? What does the conversation affect Anna? Comment on the following sense and style-wise: "And when he left me, every room, every place I went to was full of empty space. Only recently had I got used to it… And now there he is again, his enormous shadow darker, nearer than the darkness."

12. What is the significance of the following in the story: the river, the dawn, Anna's novel, the send in Marcus's pockets? Are there any other symbols?

13. What is the role of the duck shooting episode? Comment on it sense and style-wise. Comment on the rhetorical questions "Where are you? Where am I?" Who do they refer to?

14. How do the characters feel at the end of the story? Do you think Marcus is going to come again? Does he plan to stay with Anna? Does Anna expect him to do it?

15. Does the story end optimistically? Comment on the final sentence "There is always tomorrow".

Discussion Points

1. There is a shooting season in everybody's life. We become stronger when we get over it.

2. Your past shouldn't ruin your present.

3. There is always tomorrow.

Mr Tennyson

William Trevor

William Trevor (born 24 May 1928) is an Irish author and playwright. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest contemporary writers of short stories in the English language. Trevor has resided in England since the 1950s. Over the course of his long career he has written several novels and hundreds of short stories, for which he is best known. He has won the Whitbread Prize three times and has been nominated five times for the Booker Prize, most recently for his novel "Love and Summer" (2009).

Mr Tennyson

William Trevor

He had, romantically, a bad reputation. He had a wife and several children. His carry-on with Sarah Spence was a legend among a generation of girls, and the story was that none of it had stopped with Sarah Spence. His old red Ford Escort had been reported drawn up in quiet lay-bys; often he spent weekends away from home; Annie Green had come across him going somewhere on a train once, alone and morose in the buffet car. Nobody's parents were aware of the facts about him, nor were the other staff, nor even the boys at the school. His carry-on with Sarah Spence, and coming across him or his car, were a little tapestry of secrets that suddenly was yours when you became fifteen and a senior, a member of 2A. For the rest of your time at Foxfield Comprehensive - for the rest of your life, preferably - you didn't breathe a word to people whose business it wasn't.

It was understandable when you looked at him that parents and staff didn't guess. It was also understandable that his activities were protected by the senior girls. He was forty years old. He had dark hair with a little grey in it, and a face that was boyish - like a French boy's, someone had once said, and the description had stuck, often to be repeated. There was a kind of ragamuffin

innocence about his eyes. The cast of his lips suggested a melancholy nature and his smile, when it came, had sadness in it too. His name was Mr Tennyson. His subject was English.

Jenny, arriving one September in 2A, learnt all about him. She remembered Sarah Spence, a girl at the top of the school when she had been at the bottom, tall and beautiful. He carried on because he was unhappily married, she was informed. Consider where he lived even: trapped in a tiny gate-lodge on the Ilminster road because he couldn't afford anything better, trapped with a wife and children when he deserved freedom. Would he one day publish poetry as profound as his famous namesake's, though of course more up-to-date? Or was his talent lost for ever? One way or the other he was made for love.

It seemed to Jenny that the girls of 2A eyed one another, wondering which among them would become a successor to Sarah Spence. They eyed the older girls, of Class 1, 1A and 1B, wondering which of them was already her successor, discreetly taking her place in the red Ford Escort on dusky afternoons. He would never be coarse, you couldn't imagine coarseness in him. He'd never try anything unpleasant, he'd never in a million years fumble at you. He'd just be there, being himself, smelling faintly of fresh tobacco, the fingers of a hand perhaps brushing your arm by accident.

'Within the play,' he suggested in his soft voice, almost a whisper, 'order is represented by the royal house of Scotland. We must try and remember Shakespeare's point of view, how Shakespeare saw these things.'

They were studying Macbeth and Huckleberry Finn with him, but when he talked about Shakespeare it seemed more natural and suited to him than when he talked about Mark Twain.

'On Duncan's death,' he said, 'should the natural order continue, his son Malcolm would become king. Already Duncan has indicated - by making Malcolm Prince of Cumberland - that he considers him capable of ruling.'

Jenny had pale fair hair, the colour of ripened wheat. It fell from a divide at the centre of her head, two straight lines on either side of a thin face. Her eyes were large and of a faded blue. She was lanky, with legs which she considered to be too long but which her mother said she'd be thankful for one day.

'Disruption is everywhere, remember,' he said. 'Disruption in nature as well as in the royal house. Shakespeare insinuates a comparison between what is happening in human terms and in terms of nature. On the night of Duncan's death there is a sudden storm in which chimneys are blown off and houses shaken. Mysterious screams are heard. Horses go wild. A falcon is killed by a mousing owl.'

Listening to him, it seemed to Jenny that she could listen for ever, no matter what he said. At night, lying in bed with her eyes closed, she delighted in leisurely fantasies, of having breakfast with him and ironing his clothes, of walking beside him on a seashore or sitting beside him in his old Ford Escort. There was a particular story she repeated to herself: that she was on the promenade at Lyme Regis and that he came up to her and asked her if she'd like to go for a walk. They walked up to the cliffs and then along the cliff-path, and everything was different from Foxfield Comprehensive because they were alone together. His wife and he had been divorced, he told her, having agreed between themselves that they were incompatible. He was leaving Foxfield Comprehensive because a play he'd written was going to be done on the radio and another one on the London stage. 'Oh, darling,' she said, daring to say it. 'Oh, Jenny,' he said.

Terms and holidays went by. Once, just before the Easter of that year, she met him with his wife, shopping in the International Stores in Ilminster. They had two of their four children with them, little boys with freckles. His wife had freckles also. She was a woman like a sack of something, Jenny considered, with thick, unhealthy-looking legs. He was pushing a trolley full of breakfast cereals and wrapped bread, and tins. Although he didn't speak to her or even appear to

see her, it was a stroke of luck to come across him in the town because he didn't often come into the village. Foxfield had only half a dozen shops and the Bow and Arrow public house, even though it was enormous, a sprawling dormitory village that had had the new Comprehensive added to all the other new buildings in 1969. Because of the position of the Tennysons' gate-lodge it was clearly more convenient for them to shop in Ilminster.

'Hullo, Mr Tennyson,' she said in the International Stores, and he turned and looked at her. He nodded and smiled.

Jenny moved into 1A at the end of that school year. She wondered if he'd noticed how her breasts had become bigger during the time she'd been in 2A, and how her complexion had definitely improved. Her breasts were quite presentable now, which was a relief because she'd had a fear that they weren't going to develop at all. She wondered if he'd noticed her Green Magic eye-shadow. Everyone said it suited her, except her father, who always blew up over things like that. Once she heard one of the new kids saying she was the prettiest girl in the school. Adam Swann and Chinny Martin from 1B kept hanging about, trying to chat her up. Chinny Martin even wrote her notes.

'You're mooning,' her father said. 'You don't take a pick of notice these days.

'Exams,' her mother hastily interjected and afterwards, when Jenny was out of the room, quite sharply reminded her husband that adolescence was a difficult time for girls. It was best not to remark on things.

'1 didn't mean a criticism, Ellie,' Jenny's father protested, aggrieved.

'They take it as a criticism. Every word. They're edgy, see.'

He sighed. He was a painter and decorator, with his own business. Jenny was their only child. There'd been four miscarriages, all of which might have been boys, which naturally were what he'd wanted, with the business. He'd have to sell it one day, but it didn't matter all that much when you thought about it.

Having miscarriages was worse than selling a business, more depressing really. A woman's lot was harder than a man's, he'd decided long ago.

'Broody,' his wife diagnosed. 'Just normal broody. She'll see her way through it.'

Every evening her parents sat in their clean, neat sitting- room watching television. Her mother made tea at nine o'clock because it was nice to have a cup with the News. She always called upstairs to Jenny, but Jenny never wanted to have tea or see the News. She did her homework in her bedroom, a small room that was clean and neat also, with a pebbly cream wallpaper expertly hung by her father. At halfpast ten she usually went down to the kitchen and made herself some Ovaltine. She drank it at the table with the cat, Tinkle, on her lap. Her mother usually came in with the tea things to wash up, and they might chat, the conversation consisting mainly of gossip from Foxfield Comprehensive, although never of course containing a reference to Mr Tennyson. Sometimes Jenny didn't feel like chatting and wouldn't, feigning sleepiness. If she sat there long enough her father would come in to fetch himself a cup of water because he always liked to have one near him in the night. He couldn't help glancing at her eye-shadow when he said good-night and she could see him making an effort not to mention it, having doubtless been told not to by her mother. They did their best. She liked them very much. She loved them, she supposed.

But not in the way she loved Mr Tennyson. 'Robert Tennyson,' she murmured to herself in bed. 'Oh, Robert dear.' Softly his lips were there, and the smell of fresh tobacco made her swoon, forcing her to close her eyes. 'Oh, yes,' she said. 'Oh, yes, yes.' He lifted the dress over her head. His hands were taut, charged with their shared passion. 'My love,' he said in his soft voice, almost a whisper. Every night before she went to sleep his was the face that entirely filled her mind. Had it once not been there she would have thought herself faithless. And every morning, in a ceremonial way, she conjured it up again, first thing, pride of place.

Coming out of Harper's the newsagent's one Saturday afternoon, she found waiting for her, not Mr Tennyson, but Chinny Martin, with his motor-cycle on its pedestal in the street. He asked her if she'd like to go for a spin into the country and offered to supply her with a crash helmet. He was wearing a crash helmet himself, a bulbous red object with a peak and a windshield that fitted over his eyes. He was also wearing heavy plastic gloves, red also, and a red windcheater. He was smiling at her, the spots on his pronounced chin more noticeable after exposure to the weather on his motor-cycle. His eyes were serious, closely fixed on hers.

She shook her head at him. There was hardly anything she'd have disliked more than a ride into the country with Chinny Martin, her arms half round his waist, a borrowed crash helmet making her feel silly. He'd stop the motor-cycle in a suitable place and he'd suggest something like a walk to the river or to some old ruin or into a wood. He'd suggest sitting down and then he'd begin to fumble at her, and his chin would be sticking into her face, cold and unpleasant. His fingernails would be ingrained, as the fingernails of boys who owned motor-cycles always were.

'Thanks all the same,' she said.

'Come on, Jenny.'

'No, I'm busy. Honestly. I'm working at home.'

It couldn't have been pleasant, being called Chinny just because you had a jutting chin. Nicknames were horrible: there was a boy called Nut Adams and another called Wet Small and a girl called Kisses. Chinny Martin's name was Clive, but she'd never heard anyone calling him that. She felt sorry for him, standing there in his crash helmet and his special clothes. He'd probably planned it all, working it out that she'd be impressed by his gear and his motor-cycle. But of course she wasn't. Yamaha it said on the petrol tank of the motor-cycle, and there was a girl in a swimsuit which he had presumably stuck on to the tank

himself. The girl's swimsuit was yellow and so was her hair, which was streaming out behind her, as if caught in a wind. The petrol tank was black.

'Jenny,' he said, lowering his voice so that it became almost croaky. 'Listen, Jenny 'Sorry.'

She began to walk away, up the village street, but he walked beside her, pushing the Yamaha.

'I love you, Jenny,' he said.

She laughed because she felt embarrassed.

'I can't bear not seeing you, Jenny.'

'Oh, well 'Jenny.'

They were passing the petrol-pumps, the Orchard Garage. Mr Batten was on the pavement, wiping oil from his hands with a rag. 'How's he running?' he called out to Chinny Martin, referring to the Yamaha, but Chinny Martin ignored the question.

'I think of you all the time, Jenny.'

'Oh, Clive, don't be silly.' She felt silly herself, calling him by his proper name.

'D'you like me, Jenny?'

'Of course I like you.' She smiled at him, trying to cover up the lie: she didn't particularly like him, she didn't particularly not. She just felt sorry for him, with his noticeable chin and the nickname it had given him. His father worked in the powdered milk factory. He'd do the same: you could guess that all too easily.

'Come for a ride with me, Jenny.'

'No, honestly.'

'Why not then?'

'It's better not to start anything, Clive. Look, don't write me notes.'

'Don't you like my notes?'

'I don't want to start anything.'

‘There’s someone else, is there, Jenny? Adam Swann? Rick Hayes?’He sounded like a character in a television serial; he sounded sloppy and stupid.

‘If you knew how 1 feel about you,’ he said, lowering his voice even more. ‘1 love you like anything. It’s the real thing.’

‘I like you too, Clive. Only not in that way,’ she hastily added.

‘Wouldn’t you ever? Wouldn’t you even try?’

‘I’ve told you.’

‘Rick Hayes is only after sex.’

‘I don’t like Rick Hayes.’

‘Any girl with legs on her is all he wants.’

‘Yes,I know.’

‘1 can’t concentrate on things, Jenny. I think of you the entire time.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Oh God, Jenny.’

She turned into the Mace shop just to escape. She picked up a wire basket and pretended to be looking at tins of cat food. She heard the roar of the Yamaha as her admirer rode away, and it seemed all wrong that he should have gone like that, so noisily when he was so upset.

At home she thought about the incident. It didn’t in the least displease her that a boy had passionately proclaimed love for her. It even made her feel quite elated. She felt pleasantly warm when she thought about it, and the feeling bewildered her. That she, so much in love with someone else, should be moved in the very least by the immature protestations of a youth from 1B was a mystery. She even considered telling her mother about the incident, but in the end decided not to. ‘Quite sprightly, she seems,’ she heard her father murmuring.

‘In every line of that sonnet,’ Mr Tennyson said the following Monday afternoon, ‘there is evidence of the richness that makes Shakespeare not just our own greatest writer but the world’s as well.’

She listened, enthralled, physically pleasured by the utterance of each syllable. There was a tiredness about his boyish eyes, as if he hadn't slept. His wife had probably been bothering him, wanting him to do jobs around the house when he should have been writing sonnets of his own. She imagined him unable to sleep, lying there worrying about things, about his life. She imagined his wife like a grampus beside him, her mouth open, her upper lip as coarse as a man's.

'When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,' he said, 'And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field.'

Dear Jenny, a note that morning from Chinny Martin had protested. *I just want to be with you. I just want to talk to you. Please come out with me.*

'Jenny, stay a minute,' Mr Tennyson said when the bell went. 'Your essay.'

Immediately there was tension among the girls of 1A, as if the English master had caused threads all over the classroom to become taut. Unaware, the boys proceeded as they always did, throwing books into their briefcases and sauntering into the corridor. The girls lingered over anything they could think of. Jenny approached Mr Tennyson's desk.

'It's very good,' he said, opening her essay book. 'But you're getting too fond of using three little dots at the end of a sentence. The sentence should imply the dots. It's like underlining to suggest emphasis, a bad habit also.'

One by one the girls dribbled from the classroom, leaving behind them the shreds of their reluctance. Out of all of them he had chosen her: was she to be another Sarah Spence, or just some kind of stop-gap, like other girls since Sarah Spence were rumoured to have been? But as he continued to talk about her essay - called *Belief in Ghosts* - she wondered if she'd even be a stop-gap. His fingers didn't once brush the back of her hand. His French boy's eyes didn't linger once on hers.

'I've kept you late,' he said in the end.

'That's all right, sir.'

‘You will try to keep your sentences short? Your descriptions have a way of becoming too complicated.’

‘I’ll try, sir.’

‘I really enjoyed that essay.’

He handed her the exercise book and then, without any doubt whatsoever, he smiled meaningfully into her eyes. She felt herself going hot. Her hands became clammy. She just stood there while his glance passed over her eye-shadow, over her nose and cheeks, over her mouth.

‘You’re very pretty,’ he said.

‘Thank you, sir.’

Her voice reminded her of the croak in Chinny Martin’s when he’d been telling her he loved her. She tried to smile, but could not. She wanted his hand to reach out and push her gently away from him so that he could see her properly. But it didn’t. He stared into her eyes again, as if endeavouring to ascertain their precise shade of blue.

‘You look like a girl we had here once,’ he said. ‘Called Sarah Spence.’

‘1 remember Sarah Spence.’

‘She was good at English too.’

She wanted something to happen, thunder to begin, or a torrent of rain, anything that would keep them in the classroom. She couldn’t even bear the thought of walking to her desk and putting her essay book in her briefcase.

‘Sarah went to Warwick University,’ he said.

She nodded. She tried to smile again and this time the smile came. She said to herself that it was a brazen smile and she didn’t care. She hoped it made her seem more than ever like Sarah Spence, sophisticated and able for anything. She wondered if he said to all the girls who were stop-gaps that they looked like Sarah Spence. She didn’t care. His carry-on with Sarah Spence was over and done with, he didn’t even see her any more. By ail accounts Sarah Spence had let him down, but never in a million years would she. She would wait for him

for ever, or until the divorce came through. When he was old she would look after him.

'You'd better be getting home, Jenny.'

'I don't want to, sir.'

She continued to stand there, the exercise book in her left hand. She watched while some kind of shadow passed over his face. For a moment his eyes closed.

'Why don't you want to go?' he said.

'Because I'm in love with you, sir.'

'You mustn't be, Jenny.'

'Why not?'

'You know why not.'

'What about Sarah Spence?'

'Sarah was different.'

'I don't care how many stop-gaps you've had. 1 don't care. I don't love you any less.'

'Stop-gaps, Jenny?'

'The ones you made do with.'

'Made do?' He was suddenly frowning at her, his face screwed up a little. 'Made do?' he said again.

'The other girls. The ones who reminded you of her.' 'There weren't any other girls.'

'You were seen, sir-'

'Only Sarah and 1 were seen.'

'You car-'

'Give a dog a bad name, Jenny. There weren't any others.' She felt iciness inside her, somewhere in her stomach. Other girls had formed an attachment for him, as she had. Other girls had probably stood on this very spot, telling him. It was that, and the reality of Sarah Spence, that had turned him into a schoolgirls'

legend. Only Sarah Spence had gone with him in his old Ford Escort to quiet lay-bys, only Sarah Spence had felt his arms around her. Why shouldn't he be seen in the buffet-car of a train, alone? The weekends he'd spent away from home were probably with a sick mother.

'I'm no Casanova, Jenny.'

'I had to tell you I'm in love with you, sir. I couldn't not.' 'It's no good loving me, I'm afraid.'

'You're the nicest person I'll ever know.'

'No, I'm not, Jenny. I'm just an English teacher who took advantage of a young girl's infatuation. Shabby, people would say.'

'You're not shabby. Oh God, you're not shabby.' She heard her own voice crying out shrilly, close to tears. It astonished her. It was unbelievable that she should be so violently protesting. It was unbelievable that he should have called himself shabby.

'She had an abortion in Warwick,' he said, 'after a weekend we spent in an hotel. I let that happen, Jenny.'

'You couldn't help it.'

'Of course I could have helped it.'

Without wanting to, she imagined them in the hotel he spoke of. She imagined them having a meal, sitting opposite each other at a table, and a waiter placing plates in front of them. She imagined them in their bedroom, a grimy room with a lace curtain drawn across the lower part of the single window and a washbasin in a comer. The bedroom had featured in a film she'd seen, and Sarah Spence was even like the actress who had played the part of a shopgirl. She stood there in her underclothes just as the shopgirl had, awkwardly waiting while he smiled his love at her. 'Then let not winter's ragged hand deface,' he whispered, 'In thee thy summer, ere thou be distilled. Oh Sarah, love.' He took the underclothes from her body, as the actor in the film had, all the time whispering sonnets.

'It was messy and horrible,' he said. 'That's how it ended, Jenny.'

'I don't care how it ended. I'd go with you anywhere. I'd go to a thousand hotels.'

'No, no, Jenny.'

'I love you terribly.'

She wept, still standing there. He got down from the stool in front of his desk and came and put his arms about her, telling her to cry. He said that tears were good, not bad. He made her sit down at a desk and then he sat down beside her. His love affair with Sarah Spence sounded romantic, he said, and because of its romantic sheen girls fell in love with him.

They fell in love with the unhappiness they sensed in him. He found it hard to stop them.

'I should move away from here,' he said, 'but I can't bring myself to do it. Because she'll always come back to see her family and whenever she does I can catch a glimpse of her.'

It was the same as she felt about him, like the glimpse that day in the International Stores. It was the same as Chinny Martin hanging about outside Harper's, And yet of course it wasn't the same as Chinny Martin. How could it possibly be? Chinny Martin was stupid and unprepossessing and ordinary.

'I'd be better to you,' she cried out in sudden desperation, unable to prevent herself. Clumsily she put a hand on his shoulder, and clumsily took it away again. 'I would wait for ever,' she said, sobbing, knowing she looked ugly.

He waited for her to calm down. He stood up and after a moment so did she. She walked with him from the classroom, down the corridor and out of the door that led to the car park.

'You can't just leave,' he said, 'a wife and four children. It was hard to explain that to Sarah. She hates me now.'

He unlocked the driver's door of the Ford Escort. He smiled at her. He said:

‘There’s no one else 1 can talk to about her. Except girls like you. You mustn’t feel embarrassed in class, Jenny.’

He drove away, not offering her a lift, which he might have done, for their direction was the same. She didn’t in the least look like Sarah Spence: he’d probably said the same thing to all the others, the infatuated girls he could talk to about the girl he loved. The little scenes in the classroom, the tears, the talk: all that brought him closer to Sarah Spence. The love of a girl he didn’t care about warmed him, as Chinny Martin’s love had warmed her too, even though Chinny Martin was ridiculous.

She walked across the car park, imagining him driving back to his gate-lodge with Sarah Spence alive again in his mind, loving her more than ever. ‘Jenny,’ the voice of Chinny Martin called out, coming from nowhere.

He was there, standing by his Yamaha, beside a car. She shook her head at him, and began to run. At home she would sit and eat in the kitchen with her parents, who wouldn’t be any different. She would escape and lie on her bed in her small neat bedroom, longing to be where she’d never be now, beside him in his car, or on a train, or anywhere. ‘Jenny,’ the voice of Chinny Martin called out again, silly with his silly love.

Learning Activities

LA-1. Skim the text.

1. What’s the subject matter of the story?
2. Where is the story set?
3. Who are the characters?

LA-2. Scan the story.

1. Give the plot of the story in no more than 5 sentences.
2. What problems does the author pose?
3. Formulate the message of the story.
4. Comment on the language peculiarities.

Word Study

WS-1. Scan the text and find the following words and word combinations, reproduce the context in which they are used, explain what they mean:

a carry-on, a stop-gap, to become a successor to smb, brazen, to be smb's pride of place.

WS-2. Find the English equivalents for the following words and word combinations. Reproduce the context in which they are used:

тёзка, пробор посередине (о причёске), заигрывать/клеиться, выкидыш, стать легендарным.

WS-3. Give synonyms to the following words and word combinations:

to lose one's temper, nervous and worried, to faint, to make a declaration of love, unattractive/not creating a favourable impression.

Literary Appreciation

1. Read the scene-setting paragraph. What image of Mr. Tennyson is created? What stylistic means does the author resort to?
2. How does Jenny see Mr. Tennyson? Comment on the following sense and style-wise: "… trapped in a tiny gate-lodge on the Ilminster road because he couldn't afford anything better, trapped with a wife and children when he deserved freedom. Would he one day publish poetry as profound as his famous namesake's…? Or was his talent lost forever?"
3. How does the following description characterize Mr. Tennyson? "He would never be coarse, you couldn't imagine coarseness in him. He'd never try anything unpleasant, he'd never in a million years fumble at you." Whose perception is given here?
4. Read the paragraphs describing how Mr. Tennyson reads Shakespeare in class. What is the role of this episode.

5. What were Jenny's dreams about Mr. Tennyson like? Do you think they were unusual?

6. How is Mr. Tennyson's wife described? Why in such a way?

7. What are Jenny's relations with her parents? Are they close? Does she share her secrets with them?

8. Expand on the following: "Every night before she went to sleep his was the face that entirely filled her mind. Had it once not been there she would have thought herself faithless. And every morning, in a ceremonial way, she conjured it up again, first thing, pride of place".

9. Why does the author introduce Chinny Martin? What's the boy's attitude to Jenny? How does Jenny treat him? Comment on the following sense and style-wise: "He'd stop the motor-cycle in a suitable place and he'd suggest something like a walk to the river or to some old ruin or to the wood. He'd suggest sitting down and then he'd begin to fumble at her, and his chin would be sticking into her face, cold and unpleasant. His fingernails would be ingrained, as the fingernails of boys who owned motor-cycles always were".

10. Comment on the following: "He sounded like a character in a television serial; he sounded sloppy and stupid". How do these lines reflect Jenny's attitude to the boy? What effect does the alliteration employed by the author produce?

11. Why doesn't Jenny find her admirer disgusting? Comment on the following: "It didn't in the least displease her that a boy had passionately proclaimed love for her. It even made her feel quite elated. She felt pleasantly warm when she thought about it."

12. Is Mr. Tennyson's invitation to stay after the class a surprise for Jenny? How do the other girls react? Comment on the following: "Immediately there was tension among the girls of 1A, as if the English master had caused threads all over the classroom to become taunt".

13. Read the conversation between Mr. Tennyson and Jenny. How does she feel? Comment on the following: “She nodded. She tried to smile again and this time the smile came. She said to herself that it was a brazen smile and she didn’t care… She wondered if he said to all the girls who were stop-gaps that they looked like Sarah Spence. She didn’t care.”

14. Why does he tell her about his relationship with Sarah Spence? What is Jenny’s reaction? Comment on the following: “I’d go with you anywhere. I’d go to a thousand hotels”.

15. Expand on the following: “The love of a girl he didn’t care about warmed him, as Chinny Martin’s love had warmed her too, even though Chinny Martin was ridiculous”.

16. How does the story end? Do you think Jenny will stop dreaming of Mr. Tennyson?

Discussion Points

1. A woman’s lot is harder than a man’s.
2. You can’t just leave a wife and four children.
3. Give a dog a bad name.

The Bottom Line and the Sharp End

Fay Weldon

Fay Weldon (born 22 September 1931) is an English author, essayist and playwright, whose work has been associated with feminism. In her fiction, Weldon typically portrays contemporary women who find themselves trapped in oppressive situations caused by the patriarchal structure of British society.

Weldon was born in Birmingham, England to a literary family, with both her maternal grandfather and her mother writing novels. She spent her early years in Auckland, New Zealand, where her father worked as a doctor. At the age of 14, after her parents' divorce, she returned to England with her mother and her

sister. She studied psychology and economics at St Andrews, Scotland but later moved to London, where she worked in the advertising industry and then started writing for radio and television.
Fay Weldon has four sons. Her first and second marriages ended in divorce but in 1994 she married Nick Fox, a poet who is also her manager, with whom she currently lives in Dorset.

The Bottom Line and the Sharp End

Fay Weldon

'I'll get my pennies together,' said Avril the nightclub singer to Helen the hairdresser. 'I'll come in next week and you can work your usual miracles.'

Helen thought the time for miracles was almost past. Both Avril's pennies and Avril's hair were getting thin. But she merely said, "I'll do my best,' and ran her practised fingers through Avril's wiry curls without flinching.

Avril was scraggy, haggard and pitifully brave. Helen was id and worthy and could afford to be gracious. Avril had been Helen's very first client, thirty years before, when she, Helen, had finally finished her apprenticeship. In those Avril had worn expensive, daring green shoes with satin bows all the better to flirt in: Helen had worn cheap navy shoes with sensible heels, all the better to work in. Helen envied Avril. Today Avril's shoes, with their scuffed high heels, were still green, but somehow vulgar and pitiable, and the legs above them were knotted with veins. And Helen's shoes were still navy, but expensive and comfortable, and had sensible medium heels. And Helen owned the salon, and had a husband, and grown children, and savings, and a dog, a cat and a garden, and Avril had nothing. Nothing. Childless, unmarried, and without property or money in the bank.

Now Helen pitied Avril, instead of envying her, but somehow couldn't get Avril to understand that this switch had occurred.

With the decades the salon had drifted elegantly up-market, and now had a pleasing atmosphere of hushed brocaded luxury. Here now the wives of the educated wealthy came weekly, and the shampooers were well-spoken and careful not to wet the backs of blouses, and decaffeinated coffee was provided free, and low-calorie wholewheat sandwiches for a reasonable charge, and this month's glossy magazines in sufficient quantity - and still Avril would walk in, unabashed, and greet Helen with an embarrassing cry of 'darling!' as if she were her dearest friend, in her impossibly husky and actressy voice. And she'd bring wafting in with her, so that the other clients stirred uneasily in their well-padded seats, what Helen could only think of as the aura of the street: and what is more, of a street in rapid decline - once perhaps Shaftesbury' Avenue, and tolerable, with associated West End theatre and champagne cocktails, but now of some Soho alley, complete with live sex shows and heroin-pushers.

Sometimes Avril would vanish for a year or so and Helen would hope she had gone for good and then there she'd be again, crying 'do something, darling. Work your usual miracles. My life's all to hell!' and Helen would pick up the strands of brown, or red or yellow or whatever they currently were, and bleach them right down and re-colour them, and soothe and coax them into something presentable and fashionable.

This time Avril had been away all of two years. And now here she was, back again, and the 'do something' had sounded really desperate, as she'd torn at crisp dry henna-and-grey curls with ringed finger-claws, and Helen had been affected, surprisingly, with real sorrow and concern. Perhaps you didn't have to

like people to feel for them? Perhaps if they were merely around for long enough you developed a fellow-feeling for them?

She remembered how once - way, way back - when Avril's hair had been long and smooth and shiny, the rings had had diamonds and rubies on them. Then, at the time of her auburn pony-tail, there'd been engagement rings and remembrance rings: and later, once or twice - at the time Avril's hair was back-combed into blonde curls - a wedding ring. Helen could remember. But nowadays the only rings she wore were the kind anyone could buy at a jewellery stall in the market on Saturdays; they came from India or Ethiopia or somewhere ethnic, and the silver was base and the stones were glass. 'Cheap and cheerful,' Avril would cackle, from under the dryer, waving them round happily for all to see, as the other clients looked away, tactfully. They didn't wear much jewellery, and if they did it was either real or Harrods make-believe, and certainly *quiet.*

Avril came in for the latest, desperate miracle on Friday evening. She had the last appointment, and of course wanted a bleach, a perm, a cut and a set. Helen agreed to work late. It was her policy to oblige clients - even clients such as Avril - wherever possible, and however much at her own expense. It was, in the end, good for business. Just as, in the end, steadiness, forbearance, endurance, always succeeded whether at work, in marriage, in the establishment of a home, the bringing up of children. You made the most of what you had. You were not greedy; you_played safe; and you won.

Helen rang up her husband Gregory to tell him she would be working late.
'I'll take a chicken pie from the freezer,' he said, 'and there's a nature programme on TV I want to see. And perhaps I'll do a little DIY around the house.'

'Well, don't try mending the electric kettle,' she said, and he agreed not to. Still she did not hang up.

'Is there something the matter?' he said, and waited patiently. He was wonderfully patient.

'Don't you think,' she said presently, 'don't you think somehow life's awfully sad?'

'In what way?' he asked, when he'd given some time to considering the question.

'Just growing older,' she said, vaguely, already fearing she sounded silly. 'And what's it all for?'

There was a further silence at the other end of the line.

'Who's the client?'he asked.

'Avril le Ray.'

'Oh, her. She always upsets you.'

'She's so tragic, Gregory!'

'She brought it on herself,' said Gregory. 'Now I must go and take the pie out of the freezer. It's always better to heat them when they're thawed out a little, isn't that so?'

'Yes,' she said, and they said goodbye, and hung up.

Avril was ten minutes late for her appointment. She'd been crying. Her mouth was slack and sullen. Melted blue eye shadow made runnels down her cheeks. She insisted on sitting in the corner where one of the old-style mirrors still remained from before the last renovation. Avril claimed it threw back a kinder reflection and it probably did, but Avril sitting in front of it meant that Helen was obliged to work with her elbow up against the wall. The neck of Avril's blouse was soiled with a mixture of make-up, sweat and dirt. And she smelt unwashed.

But Helen, to her surprise, found the smell not unpleasant. Her Nan had smelt like that, she remembered, long ago and once upon a time, when she'd put little Helen to bed in a big, damp feather bed. Was that where the generations got

you? Did they merely progress from chaos to order, dirt to cleanliness? Was that what it was all about?

'Remember when I had long hair?' said Avril. 'So long that I could sit on it! I played Lady Godiva in the town pageant. I was in love with this boy and he said if I wanted to prove I loved him I would sit on the horse naked. So I did. Listen, I was sixteen, he was seventeen, what did we know? My mother wouldn't speak to me for months. We lived in the big house, had servants and everything. What a disgrace! She was right about one thing: I failed my exams.'

'What about the boy?' asked Helen. Whole-head root-bleaches, the kind Avril wanted, were old-fashioned, but were less finickity than the more usual bleached streaks. Helen could get on quite quickly at this stage.

'He was my one true love,' said Avril. 'We'd never done anything but hold hands and talk about running away to get married. Only after I played Godiva he never wanted to run any further than behind the bicycle shed. You know what men are like.'

'But it was his idea!'

Avril shrugged.

'He was only young. He didn't know what he'd feel like later, after I'd gone public, as it were. How could he have? So I went with him behind the bicycle sheds. It was glorious. I'll never forget it. The sun seemed to stop in the sky. You know?' 'Yes,' said Helen, who didn't. She'd only ever been with Gregory and someone else whose name she preferred to forget, at a party, a sorry, drunken episode which had left her with NSU - non-specific urethritis. Well, that's the way it goes. Fate reserves these unlikely punishments for the virtuous who sin only once, and then either get pregnant or catch a social disease. And she'd only ever made love to Gregory at night, so how could she know about the sun stopping? But at least it was love: warm, fond and affectionate, not whatever it was that ravaged and raddled Avril.

'Anyway, then he broke it to me formally that he and me were through. He'd met Miss Original Pure and planned to marry her when he had his degree. I thought I'd die from misery. But I didn't, did I? I lived to tell the tale.'

‘I do look a sight, don’t I?’ Avril said, staring at her plastery hair, but her mind was on the past. ‘It was funny. I stood in front of that full-length mirror, at the age of sixteen, and tried to decide whether to do Godiva naked or in a fkesh-coloured body-stocking. I knew even then it was what they call a major life decision. Naked, and the future would go one wav: body-stocking, another. I chose naked. Afterwards I cried and cried, I don't know why. I've always cried a lot.

'Then of course I couldn't get into college because I'd failed my exams so I went to drama school. I got no help from home - they'd given me up - and I couldn't live on my grant, no one could. So I did a centre-spread in *Mayfair,* perfectly decent just bra-less, only the photographer took a lot of other shots I knew nothing about and they were published too, and got circulated everywhere, including in my home town. I tried to sue but it was no use. No one takes you seriously once you take your clothes off, I didn't know - well, I guess I was trying to take advantage of him, too, in a way, so I can't complain. And I can tell you this, if the sun stopped behind the bicycle shed, that photographer made the whole galaxy go the other way. Know what I mean?'
‘0h yes,' said Helen, testing a lock of Avail's hair: the bleach was taking a long time to take. She wondered whether to ring Gregory and remind him not to try to mend the kettle, or whether the reminding would merely make him the mi determined to do it.

'Do I look as if I've been crying?' asked Avril, peering more closely into the mirror. 'Because I have been. This guy I've been living with: he's a junkie trying to kick the habit. He's really managed well with me. He was getting quite - well,

you know, affectionate - that's always a good sign. He used to be a teacher, really clever, until he got the habit. Young guy: bright eyes, wonderful skin - didn't often smile, but when he did ... Notice the past tense? When I got home from work this morning he'd vanished and so had my rent money. It gets you here in your heart: you can't help it: you tell yourself it was only to be expected, but it hurts, Christ it hurts. I shouldn’ t have told him I loved him, should I? Should I, Helen?’

‘I don't know,' said Helen. She told Gregory she loved him quite often and there seemed no sanction against it. But perhaps the word, as used by her, and byAvril had a different meaning. She rather hoped so.

'So you only love people who hurt you?' she asked, cautiously.

'That is love, isn't it?' said Avril. 'That's how you know you love them, because they can hurt you. Otherwise, who cares? How am I going to live without him? Just lying in bed beside him: he was so thin, but so hot: he was so alive! It was life burning him up, killing him. Just life. Too strong.'

Tears rolled down Avril's cheeks.

She looks eighty, thought Helen, but she can only be my age.

Anyway,' said Avril, 'I want a new me at the end of this session. Pick yourself up and start all over, that's my motto. Remember when you cut off all my long hair? That was after the *Mayfair* business; I didn't want anyone to recognise me, but of course they did. You can't cut off your breasts, can you? I got picked out of the end-of-the-year show by a director: very classy he was, National and all that Mid he and I got friendly, and I got the lead but I wasn't ripe for it, and the rest of the cast made a fuss and that was the end of me; three weeks later, bye-bye National. And he had a wife living in the country somewhere, and it got in the papers because he was so famous, and none of his friends would hire me, they all sided with the wife, so I got a part in a Whitehall Revue and did French maids for five years. Good wages, nice little flat, men all over the place: wonderful

dinners, diamonds. You wouldn't believe it, like in a novel, but it wasn't me. I don't know what is me, come to think of it. Perhaps no one ever does. I wanted to get married and have kids and settle down but men just laughed when I suggested it. I had a blonde, back-combed bob in those days. Remember?' '
Helen did. That was in the days when you used so much hair spray on a finished head it felt like a birds' nest to the touch.

'Then I had a real break. I could always sing, you know, and by that time I really did know something about theatre. I got the lead in a Kurt Weill opera. Real classy stuff. You did my hair black and I had a beehive[17]. How we could have gone round like that! And I fell in love with the stage manager. God, he was wonderful. Strong and silent and public school, and he really went for me, and was married, and I've never been happier in my life. But he was ambitious to get into films, and was offered a job in Hollywood and I just walked out of the part and went along. That didn't do me any good m the profession, I can tell you. And I kept getting pregnant but he didn't want us tied down so I'd have terminations, and then he went off with the studio boss's daughter: she was into yoga, and they had three kids straight off. He complained I could never sit still. But I can, can't I? You should know, shouldn’t you, Helen?'
'About as still as anyone else,' said Helen, and took Avril over to the basin and washed the bleach off. She hoped she hadn't overdone it: the hair was very fine and in poor condition and the bleach was strong.

'I left them to it; I just came back home; I didn't hang around asking for money. I never do that. Once things are over, they're over - I didn't have any children: why should he pay? We gave each other pleasure, didn't we? Fair exchange, while it lasted. Everything finishes, that's the bottom line. But I never liked beehives, did you?'
'No. Very stiff and artificial.'

'I wept and wept, but it was good-times while it lasted!'
Avril examined a lock of hair.
'Look here,' said Avril, 'that bleach simply hasn't taken. You'll have to put some more on and mix it stronger.'
'It's risky!' said Helen.
'So's everything!' said Avril. 'I'm just sick of being hennaed frizz: I want to be a smooth blonde again.'

Helen felt weary of the salon and her hank account and her marriage and everything she valued: and f her tidy hair and sensible shoes and the way she never took risks and how her youth had passed and all she'd ever known had been in front of her eyes, and fear kept her from turning her head or seeing what she would rather not see. She re-mixed the bleach, and made it strong. Avril would be as brassy a blonde as she wished, and Helen's good wishes would go with her.

'Well, of course,' said Avril, cheerfully, 'after that it was all downhill. Could I get another part? No! Too old for ingenue, too young for character and a reputation as a stripper, so Hedda Gabler was out. And frankly I don't suppose I was ever that good. Met this really nice straight guy, an engineer, but he wanted a family and I guess my body had got tired of trying, because I never fell for a baby with him, and he made some nice girl pregnant and they got married and lived happily ever after. I went to the wedding. But how was it, I ask myself, that she could get pregnant and still stay a nice girl, v and I was just somehow a slut from the beginning?'

So late, thought Helen, and the perm not even begun. Gregory will have gone to bed without me - will he notice? Will he care?

'So now I sing in night clubs; I'm a good singer, you know. All I need is the breaks and I'd really be someone ... I do the whole gamut - from the raunchy to the nostalgic, a touch of Bogart, a touch of Bacall. Those were the days, when love was love. And I tell you, Helen, it still is, and the only thing I regret is that it can't go on for ever – love, sex. The first touch of a man's hand, the feel of his lips, the press of his tongue, the way the mind goes soft and the body goes weak, the opening up, the joining in. I still feel love, and I still say love, though it's not what men want, not from me. Perhaps it comes too easily; always did. Do you think that's what the matter is?'

When Helen took Avril to the washbasin and washed the second lot of bleach away, a good deal of Avril's hair came with it. Helen felt her hands grow cold, and her head fill with black: she all but fainted. Then she wept. Nothing like this had ever happened before, in all her professional career. She trembled so much that Avril had to rinse off what was left of the bleach from what was left of her hair, herself.

'Well,' said Avril, when it was done, and large areas of her reddened scalp all too apparent, 'that's the bottom line and the sharp end. Nothing lasts, not even hair. My fault. I made you do it. Thirty years of hating me years of hating me, and you finally got your revenge!'

'I never hated you,' said Helen, her face puffy and her eyes swollen. She felt, on the other side of the shock and horror agreeably purged, sensuous, like her Nan's little girl again. 'Well, you ought to have,' said Avril. 'The way I always stirred things up in here. I just loved the look on your face!'

After a little Avril said, 'I wonder what my future is, as a bald nightclub singer? I suppose I could wear a wig till it grows again, but I don't think I will, it might be rather good. After the Godiva look, the Doris Day look, the Elizabeth Taylor look, then the Twiggy look - the frizz-but, the pile-up and the freak-out - none of

which did me any good at all - just plain bald might work wonders for a girl's career.'

A month later Avril le Ray was billed in Mayfair, not Soho, on really quite tasteful posters, and Helen, bravely, took Gregory around to listen to her sing. They went cautiously down into the darkness, where Avril's coarse and melancholy voice filled out the lonely corners nicely, and a pink spotlight made her look not glamorous - for truly she was bald, and how can the bald be glamorous? - but important, as if her sufferings and her experience might be of considerable interest to others, and the customers certainly paid attention, were silent when she sang, and clapped when she'd finished, which was more than usually happened in such places.

'How you doing, Kiddo?' asked Avril of Helen, after the last set, going past on the arm of a glowing-eyed Arab with a hooked nose, waving a truly jeweled ring, properly set in proper gold.' Remember what I told you about the bottom line and the sharp end? Nothing lasts, so you'd better have as much as you can, while you can. And in the end, there's only you and only them, and not what they think of you, but what you think of them.'

Learning Activities

LA-1. Skim the story.

1. What is the subject matter of the text under analysis?
2. Can you say that your impression of the story is contradictory? What emotions has the story evoked in you?
3. What is the relationship between the characters?

LA-2. Scan the text.

1. Give the plot of the story in no more than 4 sentences.
2. How can you formulate the key problem raised by the author?

3. What makes the jumbled composition of the story especially appealing? What is the function of the alternation between the first- and third-person narratives? Can we qualify this story as a kind of a heroine's confession? Why / why not?
4. How can you characterize the language of the story?
5. Is it clear who is the protagonist / antagonist in this story? Why / why not?
6. Account for the title of the story.
7. Formulate the main idea of the story.

Word Study

WS-1. Find the English equivalents for the following words and word combinations. Reproduce the context in which they are used:
выглядеть чучелом, натренированные пальцы, «Я жила так, чтобы было что вспомнить!», имитация (например, драгоценностей), наркоша,“дёшево и сердито”.
WS-2. Give synonyms to the following words and word combinations:
challenging / bold, to cajole smb into smth, tolerance / patience, to do smb a favour, an abortion, unembarrassed, overelaborate, to set in motion / to disturb.
9) expensive.
WS-3. Find in the text and take down minimum 7 words / word combinations used to describe a person's hair, its styles, colour and a hairdresser's operations.

Literary Appreciation

1. What do we learn about the characters at the beginning of the story? How are they described? How does it characterize them?
2. How does the author describe Helen's and Avril's lifestyle? Comment on the following sense- and style-wise: “And Helen owned the salon, and had a husband, and grown children, and savings, and a dog, a cat and a garden, and Avril had nothing. Nothing. Childless, unmarried, and without property or money in the bank.”

3. What is Helen’s attitude to Avril? Comment on the following sense- and style-wise: “Helen had been affected, surprisingly, with real sorrow and concern. Perhaps you didn't have to like people to feel for them? Perhaps if they were merely around for long enough you developed a fellow-feeling for them?”

4. What are Helen’s life principles? Comment on the following: “You made the most of what you had. You were not greedy; you played safe; and you won”. How would you characterize her?

5. What does Avril look like when she comes to Helen this time? Does she look a sight? Does Helen find her appearance unpleasant?

6. What is Avril’s life philosophy? Find in the text and quote the lines expressing it. Is her or Helen’s vision of life closer to yours? Why?

7. How can you interpret Avril’s emotions as reflected in: “No one takes you seriously once you take your clothes off.”? Does this statement make you sympathize with her?

8. How does the following line characterize Avril: “Pick yourself up and start all over, that’s my motto.”

9. What are the heroines’ ideas of love? Who do you support?

10. What role does a witty run-through of all the various styles Avril has undergone play in the story?

11. Does Helen understand Avril? Do you think she envies her a little?

12. Expand on the following: “It’s risky!” said Helen. “So is everything!” said Avril”.

13. Which episode do you think is the climax of the story? How are the two women’s life philosophies tested? Who is the winner?

14. How does the story end? Comment on Avril’s words “Nothing lasts, so you’d better have as much as you can, while you can”. Do you agree?

Discussion Points

1. “That’s how you know you love them, because they hurt you. Otherwise, who cares?” Do you agree?

2. Once things are over, they are over.

3. That’s the bottom line and the sharp end. Nothing lasts.

4. Pick yourself up and start all over.

5. Moderation and steadiness bring success and happiness.

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