WOMEN'S WRITING

COURSE CODE: B21EG03DE

Undergraduate Programme in English

Discipline Specific Elective Course

Self Learning Material

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Access and Quality define Equity.

Women's Writing

Course Code: B21EG03DE

Semester - V

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Undergraduate Programme
English Language and Literature
Self Learning Material

(With Model Question Paper Sets)

SGOU

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BA English Language and Literature

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The university aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The undergraduate programme in English Language and Literature has been designed to be on par with the high-quality academic programmes offered at state universities throughout the country. Considerable emphasis has been placed on incorporating the latest trends in the delivery of programmes focused on English Language and Literature. Our aspiration is that this programme will augment your aptitude for comprehending both the language itself and its accompanying literary works. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.

Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-06-2024

Contents

SGOU

BLOCK - 01

Historical Introduction

Unit 1

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens

-Alice Walker

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- become aware of Walker's concept of Womanism
- get acquainted with African-American experience of brutal racism, disenfranchisement and colour prejudice
- familiarise themselves with the concept of black feminism
- appreciate diverse forms of artistic expression

Prerequisites

Imagine a garden, lush and hidden, thriving quietly in unlikely places, its flowers blooming against all odds. This is how Alice Walker envisions the artistry of African American women in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." Her work reflects a profound exploration of creativity stifled by history's harshest realities – slavery, poverty, and a society that refused to acknowledge their voices. Walker asks us to consider the beauty and potential of African American women that, despite severe obstacles, managed to survive, often in uncelebrated, subtle ways.

She recounts figures like Phillis Wheatley, the poet who lived her life enslaved, and Jean Toomer, who admired the spirituality of Black women as they withstood unthinkable hardship. Walker points to her own mother's gift of gardening as an example of art that was woven into everyday survival, passed down through generations. As we look deeper into Walker's essay, we're invited to discover the hidden gardens of creativity and resilience planted by these women, sometimes unknowingly, and to recognize how they still bloom within us today.

Walker's essay isn't just a history lesson; it's a call to appreciate and reclaim a suppressed legacy—one that is rich, vibrant, and often overlooked. Let's unpack her argument, her personal reflections, and her use of historical examples to see how she makes this legacy come alive.

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Keywords

Autonomy, Racial suppression, Sexism, Colour prejudice, Black American Women

1.1.1 Alice Walker

Alice Walker, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, has written several best-selling novels, some of which have inspired popular films. In her work "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*"* (1983), Walker reflects on her mother's lived experiences through the lens of African-American women's lives, both past and present. Her writing amplifies the voices of the excluded, particularly Black women, giving them a platform to express their perspectives. This essay examines how Black women have used their voices to articulate their creativity. It explores how Walker's distinctive writing style and approach highlight the creative spirit of Black women and its expression amidst daily discrimination, abuse, and violence. It also explores the diverse ways in which Black women presented their creativity.The article compares the lives of creative white women and Black women to illustrate differences in the origins and expressions of their creativity. Alice Walker discusses the idolization of Black women as "saints" and questions whether this perspective is justified. The essay incorporates Walker's own words and the author's personal narratives to exemplify the resilient creativity of Black women, supporting her viewpoints.

1.1.2 Summary of the Essay

Walker develops her argument by referring to the experiences of others, including Jean Toomer, a poet from the early 1920s. Toomer observed that Black women were unique, possessing an intense spirituality despite enduring relentless physical and emotional hardships daily. He described them as "Saints—crazy, pitiful saints" in the truest sense. Walker affirms that, without question, our mothers and grandmothers belong to this group.

Building on Toomer's observations, Walker effectively explores the immense challenges faced by Black women during that time. She emphasizes the difficulty of being a mother, grandmother, or simply a woman in a society that marginalized them—challenges further compounded by the fact that they were Black. These women endured relentless suffering without any hope that tomorrow might bring change or relief. As a result, they were unable to fully express themselves or explore their potential, constrained by societal expectations and systemic oppression.

In the opening of "In *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,*" Alice Walker quotes Jean Toomer's Cane, presenting how early literature by Black men often portrayed Black women as hopeless and reduced to mere sex objects. Toomer writes, "I asked her to hope, and build up an inner life against the coming of that day…I sang, with a strange quiver in my voice, a promise song." This sets the stage for Walker's essay, which focuses on the resilience of Black women throughout history, who created masterpieces from the limited resources and opportunities available to them.

Walker explores how Black women's potential for creative freedom was stifled by social

positions that imposed restrictive tropes and caricatures, delegitimizing their work and suppressing their artistic expression. She argues that Black women were denied the opportunity to pursue their dreams, as they were burdened with the primary responsibilities of raising children, obeying their husbands, and maintaining their families.

Toomer's observations reflect a similar sentiment, noting that Black women were often unhappy and felt unloved. Both Walker and Toomer assert that Black women were not allowed to dream, let alone pursue those dreams. Walker writes, "They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality, which is the basis of art, that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane." This haunting depiction shows the profound toll of systemic oppression on Black women's creative potential.

Walker goes on to discuss how the effects of this oppression have caused many talented Black women to remain unnoticed or unheard. She cites cultural icons like Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, and Aretha Franklin to emphasise the immense talent within the Black community. These figures, though celebrated, represent only a fraction of the creative brilliance that might have flourished if more Black women had been afforded the freedom and opportunities to develop their artistic gifts.

Alice Walker wrote about Black mothers and grandmothers across the past century and beyond, portraying them as hidden artists whose creativity was stifled by social constraints. She explains, "For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not saints, but artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release." Walker explores the oppressive existence of Black women, who endured the most humiliating and degrading conditions imaginable. They were often treated as sexual objects by men in their lives, including owners, lovers, and others who sought to exploit them.

Walker emphasises that these women were not inherently saints, but the severe mistreatment they endured effectively sanctified them in the eyes of history. This pejorative treatment transformed their suffering into a testament to their resilience. In her work, Walker also paraphrases Okot p'Bitek's poignant poem, writing, "O, my clanswomen let us cry together! Let us mourn the death of our mother, the death of a queen… the creator of our stool is lost! And all the young women have perished in the wilderness." The tone of this excerpt is deeply melancholic and despairing, capturing the hopelessness of generations of women who endured a midnight that offered no promise of dawn.

Another example Walker uses to strengthen her argument is the story of Phillis Wheatley, a Black slave girl with fragile health. Phillis was a poet and writer of remarkable talent, but her status as a slave severely limited her ability to fully develop or share her gift. She owned nothing – not even her own body – and her attempts at self-expression were often drowned out by the demands of forced labour and pregnancies. Ultimately, Phillis lost her health and, eventually, her life, leaving her potential unfulfilled and her voice stifled by the brutal realities of her time.

Alice Walker used the story of Phillis Wheatley to present the harsh reality that African American women of her time were neither allowed nor afforded the luxury of time to develop their talents or fully express themselves.

By doing so, Walker shows that these women lived constrained lives, boxed in by the demands of hard labour and forced servitude, with no outlet for their emotions or creativity. She points out that we may never know if any of these women could have become poets, singers, or actresses, as they were never given the opportunity to explore their potential.

Walker emphasises that the "artist" within African American women is not always easily recognised. She identifies artistry as often expressed through their spirituality—a profound belief in the unseen world that transcends formal religious affiliation. This spirituality found expression in their participation in church activities, particularly in singing and communal worship. For many African American women, the church became a creative and emotional outlet, intertwining lived experience with spiritual practice, helping them navigate life's frustrations and madness.

To further illustrate the hidden artistry of African American women, Walker juxtaposes the lives of Virginia Woolf and Phillis Wheatley. Referring to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Walker commends Woolf's observation that, "in order for a woman to write fiction she must have two things, a room of her own and money to support herself." Walker acknowledges that even white women faced significant barriers to being recognised as artists and creators in the early 1900s. However, she contrasts Woolf's circumstances with those of African American women, noting that Woolf, as a white woman, had privileges that allowed her to rent her own space and earn money to sustain her writing.

Walker also reflects on Woolf's tragic end, writing that "any woman born with a great gift would have ended her days… having been hindered or thwarted by contrary instincts that she would most certainly lose her health or sanity." She acknowledges that Woolf's artistry contributed to her mental decline, which ultimately led her to take her own life. Unlike African American women like Wheatley, whose lives and opportunities were destroyed by external oppression, Woolf's death, though tragic, was a consequence of internal struggles rather than the direct actions of a society that sought to annihilate her.

In contrast, Phillis Wheatley, a poet and author, struggled with poor health throughout her life, yet still found meaning and purpose in her creative expression when others saw her as insignificant. The "contrary instincts" that Virginia Woolf described in her own life were also present in Wheatley's experience. Captured as a slave at age seven, Wheatley endured a life of forced labour under a cruel master. Despite living in oppressive circumstances, marked by loveless relationships, raising children, and enduring constant hardship, Wheatley managed to create remarkable works of art. Her creativity was not only a testament to her resilience but, in some ways, was fueled by the pain and anguish she endured. Unlike her white counterpart Woolf, Wheatley did not choose to end her life, but like Woolf, she found ways to overcome her circumstances and express herself through her writing.

By drawing upon these two powerful examples, Walker strengthens her argument with compelling, real-life evidence. These are not isolated cases but represent shared experiences within the African American community. Walker confidently asserts that there were many women like Phillis Wheatley during that time—possibly including her own mother and grandmothers. This evidence is concrete because it is based on real events, not fictional or imagined ones. The harsh realities of slavery, forced pregnancies, poverty, and artistic

suppression were all too real during the era of Walker's grandmothers, and no one can deny these truths or the existence of figures like Phillis Wheatley and Jean Toomer.

Considering Alice Walker's own authority on the subject, she can be seen as an expert and a reliable source. Born and raised in poverty by hard working parents, Walker experienced firsthand what it was like to grow up in difficult circumstances. Despite her mother not being a poet or novelist, Walker recognises her as an artist in her own right. Her mother's artistry was expressed through her beautiful gardens, which Alice witnessed and appreciated. Walker's personal experiences lend credibility to her understanding of poverty, artistic suppression, and the unrecognised talents within marginalised communities.

The accounts Alice Walker uses to support her arguments are firmly rooted in African American history, a subject she knows deeply and personally. This knowledge, passed down through her family or shared as part of the collective wisdom of her community, forms the foundation of her insights. Walker is not only well-educated but also a passionate reader and a talented artist. She often references Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, drawing parallels between the struggles faced by white women and the even greater hardships endured by Black women. While Walker appreciates Woolf's critique of the social constraints on women, she argues that Black women experienced the most profound suffering, particularly in the suppression of their artistic potential – an experience her mother and grandmothers endured intimately.

Walker presents the dual injustices African American women artists, such as Phillis Wheatley, faced. The first was a life filled with relentless uncertainty, comparable to waiting in a never-ending "proverbial waiting room." These women lived under the constant threat of their children being taken from them, sold away by an oppressive system. They also faced uncertainty about the fathers of their children – whether they would remain present, leave voluntarily, or be sold away themselves. Their existence was characterised by an unending wait for positive outcomes, which rarely, if ever, materialised. Even when they did, the results were often disappointing, further emphasising the weight of their struggles.

The second harsh reality faced by African American women was the forced anonymity of their artistic lives. Their talents – whether in poetry, singing, writing, politics, or architecture – remained largely unrecognised and unexpressed due to a lack of public outlets. Their creative gifts often perished with them, unacknowledged and unseen. Even when these women managed to create something remarkable, their contributions were frequently stolen, dismissed, or left unattributed. Walker stresses this point with an example of a quilt displayed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. This quilt, crafted from discarded rags, depicts the story of the Crucifixion through simple yet inspired figures. Despite its priceless artistry, it is credited only to an "anonymous Black woman in Alabama," symbolising the pervasive erasure of Black women's contributions, even when their work held profound cultural and artistic significance.

Walker also references Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Phillis Wheatley, juxtaposing their lives to present the disparities in opportunity and recognition. Walker conveys that all of Woolf's fears were Wheatley's reality. While Woolf theorised about the struggles women faced in expressing their gifts, Wheatley lived those struggles. Woolf wrote, "Any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed,

shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty." Walker points out that Wheatley, despite receiving limited freedom of expression and education from her enslavers, endured precisely what Woolf dreaded.

Walker focuses on Woolf's phrase "contrary instincts," interpreting it as the internal conflict Wheatley likely experienced. Wheatley had been conditioned to believe that her origins were uncivilised and inferior. This conflict is evident in Wheatley's poetry, where she references a "goddess" whom Walker interprets as Wheatley's owner—a person she paradoxically admired despite being enslaved by them. Through this analysis, Walker explores the profound psychological toll of slavery on Black women, whose artistic potential was suppressed and whose identities were fractured by a system that denied them agency and self-worth.

According to Alice Walker, society often viewed Black women as "the mule of the world," a label that contributed to their dehumanisation and a sense of hopelessness. Walker explores this idea further through a personal account of her mother, presenting the resilience and creativity of Black women despite their circumstances. She reflects, "And yet, it is to my mother—and all our mothers who were not famous—that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the Black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day."

Walker describes her mother's seemingly simple yet profound talent for gardening. For her, this ability to nurture beauty despite living in poverty symbolises her mother's strength and perseverance. She recounts, "She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all our beds. There was never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own private thoughts; never a time free from interruption—by work or the noisy inquiries of children." This depiction presents the theme of legacy, a recurring motif in Walker's essay. Walker sees her mother's creativity and resilience as a legacy of respect and inspiration, stating, "Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life." Through this reflection, Walker reveals how her exploration of her mother's life helped her find and understand herself, as well as her cultural heritage.

Walker concludes her essay by asserting that Phillis Wheatley's mother was also an artist in her own right and that the achievements of their daughters were, in part, shaped by their mothers' influence. She posits that a mother's contributions are inherently tied to every accomplishment of her child, suggesting that any artistic output by an individual is also a product of their mother's influence. Walker poetically describes children as their mothers' greatest creations—"their very own wonderful gardens." This conclusion ties into her method of tracing artistic lineage, as she links Phillis Wheatley's creativity to her mother's influence. Beyond the poverty and hardships endured by previous generations of mothers and grandmothers, Walker emphasises that their ability to express themselves artistically was often realised through their children—their enduring and vibrant legacies.

1.1.3 Critical Analysis

Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" explores the suppressed artistic talents of African American women, particularly those lost due to slavery and the social constraints of a forced way of life. She uncovers the artistic legacy of these women, drawing upon historical events, personal experiences, and the collective memory of the African American community. Her arguments are enriched by personal recollections and accounts of figures like Jean Toomer and Phillis Wheatley, whose lives embody the struggles and resilience of African American women.

Walker presents the impact of systemic oppression on the lives of her mother and grandmothers, emphasising that much of their potential was stifled by poverty, forced labour, and a lack of opportunities. However, she finds hope in the idea that their artistic spirit was not entirely extinguished—it manifested in small, meaningful ways, such as the gardens they cultivated or the care they poured into their daily lives. Walker connects this creativity to the broader notion that mothers pass down their artistic essence to their children, who become their "most wonderful gardens."

Walker constructs her argument through vivid historical and personal narratives. She incorporates Jean Toomer's observation that African American women, despite enduring relentless hardships, exuded a profound spirituality, describing them as "saints—crazy, pitiful saints." Toomer's portrayal displays the resilience and spiritual depth of Black women, which Walker extends to her own lineage. Similarly, Phillis Wheatley, an enslaved poet, serves as another compelling example. Walker illustrates how Wheatley's fragile health, lack of autonomy, and the demands of slavery stifled her potential, preventing her from fully realising her artistic gifts.

Through these accounts, Walker argues that the artistic expression of African American women was systematically suppressed. However, she also suggests that this suppression does not negate their creativity. Instead, their talents found subtle expressions in the everyday aspects of their lives, which were often overlooked or undervalued. Walker's portrayal of her mother as an artist—expressed through her gardens—exemplifies this perspective, asserting that creativity exists even in the smallest, most unassuming acts.

Walker's essay combines historical evidence with personal anecdotes, creating a deeply resonant narrative. By referencing figures like Toomer and Wheatley, she situated her argument within a broader historical context, lending credibility to her claims. Her personal experiences further ground her arguments, providing an intimate and authentic perspective on the struggles of African American women.

The essay appeals to a general audience, transcending racial or ethnic boundaries. Walker's intention is to inform and inspire readers by shedding light on the untold stories of African American women and their unrecognised artistic contributions. She emphasises the importance of recognising and appreciating these "gardens" of creativity, even if they are not immediately apparent.

Walker concludes her essay by asserting that mothers profoundly influence their children's achievements, suggesting that artistic output is inherently tied to maternal legacy. She poetically describes children as their mothers' most beautiful creations, their "wonderful gardens." This conclusion encapsulates her central argument: that despite the oppressive

conditions faced by African American women, their creativity persisted and found expression through their descendants.

Alice Walker's use of personal experiences and historical accounts lends authenticity to her arguments, as she draws on real examples like Jean Toomer's observations and Phillis Wheatley's struggles to illustrate the systemic suppression of African American women's creativity. However, her focus is largely on the tragic and oppressive aspects of history, overlooking stories of resilience or success among African American women who may have risen above their circumstances. While this reinforces her essay's central theme of systemic artistic suppression, it limits the narrative to a predominantly sombre perspective, excluding examples that could highlight the capacity for triumph amid adversity.

The Garden Metaphor

Alice Walker's metaphor of a garden holds varied meanings depending on individual perspectives and contexts. Walker uses the garden to symbolise the universal human pursuit of peace, purpose, and identity—a space where life gains meaning. Within her work, the garden becomes a place of "somebodiness," reflecting fulfilment and self-worth. For the African American experience, however, the search for this metaphorical garden involves a lifelong struggle against systemic racism and disenfranchisement rooted in their skin colour. It displays the resilience and determination required to cultivate dignity and meaning in the face of persistent social and institutional barriers

Contrary Instincts

It refers to the social forces that instilled feelings of inferiority, guilt, and conflict in women regarding their literary ambitions. Even if a woman aspired to write, society opposed such aspirations and diminished her for having them.

Alice Walker adopts Virginia Woolf's phrase "contrary instincts" to describe the creative spirit cherished by her female ancestors, who managed to nurture their artistry while enduring oppressive conditions.

Recap

- Walker opens her essay by quoting Jean Toomer's Cane
- She explores the suppressed artistic talents of African American women lost due to slavery and forced lifestyles
- Society viewed Black women as "the mule of the world," causing them to

become emotionless and hopeless

- Walker sees her mother's gardening despite poor conditions as a symbol of resilience and strength
- Toomer and Walker believed Black women were denied the ability to dream or pursue aspirations
- Walker cites artists like Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Aretha Franklin to highlight lost Black talent
- Walker paraphrases Okot p'Bitek's melancholic and hopeless poem about generational suffering
- Phillis Wheatley, a Black slave girl with poor health, is used to exemplify Black women's hardships
- Walker often cites Woolf's A Room of One's Own to compare white women's struggles with Black women's greater suffering
- African American women like Phillis Wheatley endured both forced anonymity and stifled creative expression
- Walker uses Woolf's phrase "contrary instincts" to describe the creative spirit of her female ancestors under oppression
- Walker concludes that Phillis Wheatley's artistry was influenced by her mother, symbolizing maternal creativity passed down

Objective Questions

1. Who was Jean Toomer?
2. Name the poem that Alice Walker quoted in the opening of her essay *In Search of her Mother's Garden.*
3. What happened to Phillis Wheatley at the end of her life?
4. Who wrote the essay *A Room of One's Own*?
5. Who used the phrase 'contrary instincts'?
6. How society viewed Black women, according to Alice Walker?
7. What was the theme of Okot p Bitek's poem?
8. According to Walker, what has the black woman inherited?
9. The title of this essay describes Walker's search for.....
10. Where does Walker find art?

Answers

1. American poet associated with Harlem Renaissance
2. Cane
3. She lost her health
4. Virginia Woolf
5. Virginia Woolf
6. Mule of the world
7. Wildernesses and hopelessness
8. Creative spirit
9. Creativity
10. Everywhere and in any medium.

Assignments

1. What are the main points in Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mother's Garden"?
2. What does Walker mean by Contrary Instincts?
3. What is Walker's attitude towards the early American poet, Phyllis Wheately?
4. According to Walker, what are the ways African American women maintained their Creative Spirit?

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BLOCK - 02

Essays

SGOU

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Unit 1

Jane Eyre and *Wuthering Heights* (*The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*)

-Virginia Woolf

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify the distinct literary styles of Charlotte and Emily Bronte
- evaluate Woolf's critique of the Bronte Sisters
- develop the ability to compare and contrast works by different authors, using Woolf's analysis as a framework
- analyse Woolf's admiration for Emily Bronte's more universal and poetic vision

Prerequisites

Imagine yourself on the rugged moors of Wuthering Heights, feeling the wild, unrelenting passion of Heathcliff and Catherine's love—have you ever encountered anything so untamed in literature? Now step into the quiet corridors of Jane Eyre, where Jane's steady courage leads her through a journey of love, independence, and morality. Could these two worlds be more different? Virginia Woolf, a literary visionary, invites us to explore this contrast. She asks us to consider: How does Wuthering Heights capture the raw chaos of human emotion, while Jane Eyre shapes its power into something disciplined and deliberate? What do these novels reveal about the sisters who wrote them—and about the world they dared to confront? As we explore Woolf's essay, ask yourself: Why do these stories still resonate? Is it their vivid characters, their emotional depth, or something more profound about the human spirit? Let's unravel their timeless magic together.

Keywords

Novel, Women, Femininity, Victorian Age, Bronte sisters, Narrative style

2.1.1 Discussion

The first half of the nineteenth century, known as the English Romantic period, was defined by the works of canonical poets like William Wordsworth, John Keats, S.T. Coleridge, P.B. Shelley, and Lord Byron, alongside novelists such as Jane Austen, Walter Scott, and Thomas Love Peacock. The second half of the century is recognized as the Victorian period (1837–1901), coinciding with the reign of Queen Victoria over Great Britain and its empire.

During the Victorian era, England's national identity faced disruptions, particularly due to colonial wars. The Industrial Revolution further shaped this period, leading to the rise of new industrial cities, the proliferation of slums, and the exploitation of the working class—issues that deeply influenced Victorian writers like Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. While England amassed material wealth, it also made significant intellectual strides. Charles Darwin and his contemporaries revolutionised scientific thought, while social and political thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer initiated profound rethinking on governance and social norms. The Oxford Movement, meanwhile, challenged the doctrines of the Church of England, creating ripples in the religious and ethical landscape of the time.

Education also underwent transformation during this period. Though still uneven, popular education became more accessible, spurred by new education acts. This, in turn, expanded the demand for intellectual material and books, fostering a flourishing literary culture. The growing readership embraced novels, cementing the era as a golden age for fiction.

Despite these advancements, Victorian society was marked by its infamous moral rigidity, with strict codes governing public and private life. The middle-class sensibilities, influenced by the Church, shaped a moral framework that addressed issues like gender equality, censorship, and sexuality—major discourses of the time. This juxtaposition of progress and repression makes the Victorian period a fascinating era of literary and cultural exploration.

The Bronte sisters wrote during the Victorian era, a time when social norms and patriarchal ideologies severely restricted women's opportunities and agency in the public sphere. Their literary contributions can be viewed as a reflection of the struggles faced by women striving to establish their own identities during the 19th century. This was also the period when women's suffrage movements were beginning to gain momentum, yet women were denied basic rights such as voting, owning property, suing, or keeping their income. These systemic barriers hindered their progress, mobility, and visibility in Victorian society.

Although the Bronte sisters received an education, their options for financial independence were extremely limited. Women were expected to marry, and their career choices were often confined to roles like schoolmistresses or governesses for wealthy families. Both Charlotte and Anne Bronte worked as governesses, while Emily Bronte was briefly employed as a schoolmistress. Despite these constraints, their works featured strong, independent female characters who challenged the conventions of their time. These characters are vivid depictions of an era that underestimated women's capabilities, presenting individuals who thought freely and deeply. For this reason, the Bronte sisters can be seen as precursors to early feminist thought in Britain, addressing complex themes such as loneliness, domestic violence, revenge, and emotional trauma.

For instance, *Jane Eyre* tells the story of an orphaned girl who endures humiliation and hardship while living with her aunt and later at a harsh boarding school. Despite these challenges, Jane grows into a resilient and self-reliant woman. Her relationship with Mr. Rochester, a widower, brings both comfort and turmoil, reflecting the constraints and compromises women face in love and society.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte presents the stormy and destructive love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. Heathcliff's obsession with Catherine transcends conventional depictions of romance in English literature but manifests in toxic and vengeful actions. He marries and mistreats Catherine's sister-in-law, Isabella, as part of his revenge against Edgar Linton, Catherine's husband. This narrative exposes problematic portrayals of womanhood: Catherine dies heartbroken, married to someone she did not truly love, while Isabella becomes a pawn in Heathcliff's vendetta.

Through their works, the Bronte sisters explored the complex intersections of gender, agency, and social expectations, leaving a profound mark on English literature and early feminist discourse.

2.1.2 Summary of the Essay

Virginia Woolf's reflections on Charlotte and Emily Bronte's literary works explore their unique artistic qualities, shared themes, and differences as writers. The analysis presents the enduring power of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, with Woolf drawing attention to the sisters' extraordinary ability to evoke emotion, their poetic tendencies, and the universality of their creative visions.

Charlotte Bronte's life, tragically cut short at 39, was shaped by the remote and austere Yorkshire moors. These circumstances deeply influenced her work, including her most celebrated novel, *Jane Eyre*. Despite fears that the novel's mid-Victorian sensibilities might render it antiquated, Woolf asserts that *Jane Eyre* transcends its time. Its opening pages draw readers into a vividly atmospheric world, where the "long and lamentable blast" of a November day feels timeless, carrying an intensity that grips the reader until the very end.

Woolf notes that *Jane Eyre*'s power lies in its unwavering focus on the protagonist's perspective. The narrative immerses readers so completely in Jane's world that they cannot dissociate her experiences from the settings and characters around her. Rochester, the moors, and even the richly described drawing-room—"white carpets...brilliant garlands of flowers...pale Parian mantelpiece...sparkling Bohemia glass"—are inextricably tied to Jane herself.

However, Woolf critiques the limitations of Jane Eyre. Its narrow focus on Jane as a governess and a lover confines the narrative scope. Compared to the multifaceted characters of Jane Austen or Tolstoy, Bronte's characters lack complexity. Their existence is defined solely through their creator's lens, making their world dependent on Charlotte's voice rather than standing independently.

Woolf compares Charlotte Bronte's work to that of Thomas Hardy, noting similarities in their commanding personalities and constrained visions. Yet, Hardy's novels, such as Jude the Obscure, allow readers to reflect and engage with broader philosophical questions, presenting characters as conduits for deep existential inquiries. In contrast, Charlotte's writing is intensely personal, centered around her declarations of love, hatred, and suffering.

This self-contained intensity is both Charlotte's strength and limitation. Woolf observes

that Bronte's forceful, poetic style often sacrifices subtlety and broader human insights. Nonetheless, her prose, shaped by raw emotion and a refusal to conform to literary conventions, bears a distinctive and enduring beauty.

Woolf identifies Emily Bronte as the greater poet and visionary of the two sisters, making *Wuthering Heights* a more complex and challenging work than *Jane Eyre*. Emily's creative impulse stemmed not from personal suffering but from a universal perspective. Her novel grapples with grand, almost cosmic themes, transcending individual experiences.

While Charlotte's writing centers on the self—"I love, I hate, I suffer"—Emily's work evokes a collective voice. The characters in *Wuthering Heights* speak to the eternal struggles of humanity: "we, the whole human race" and "you, the eternal powers." Woolf presents this shift from the personal to the universal as the defining difference between the sisters.

Emily's vision in *Wuthering Heights* reflects a "gigantic ambition," striving to unify a fractured world through her narrative. Her characters, like Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, are imbued with an elemental power that defies conventional human behavior. Catherine's declaration—"If all else perished and HE remained, I should still continue to be"—and her contemplation of the eternal afterlife underscore the novel's transcendent quality.

Both Charlotte and Emily Bronte invoked nature to express the inexpressible. Their use of storms, moors, and seasons reflects the characters' inner turmoil and elevates their narratives beyond mere realism. Woolf emphasises that for the Brontes, nature was not an ornamental device but an emotional and thematic extension of their characters.

In *Villette*, for instance, Charlotte describes a storm to mirror psychological unrest: "The skies hang full and dark—a wrack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms." Similarly, Emily's depiction of the moors and storms in *Wuthering Heights* carries the raw, untamed emotions of her characters. However, neither sister observed nature with the precision of Dorothy Wordsworth or Tennyson; instead, they sought to capture its emotional resonance, using it as a metaphor for the passions within their characters.

Woolf considers Emily Bronte a poet at heart, whose work embodies a rare ability to liberate life from its dependence on facts. Her characters, though improbable by conventional standards, transcend reality through the sheer force of her imagination. Heathcliff, for example, may seem implausible as a real man, yet his vivid existence defies such skepticism. The same holds true for Catherine Earnshaw and her daughter, who emerge as some of the most compelling women in English literature.

Emily's poetic vision permeates *Wuthering Heights*, infusing the narrative with a life force that surpasses mere realism. By evoking the wind on the moors or the sheep grazing in the fields, she creates a world where even the smallest details resonate with profound emotional significance.

Woolf observes that Emily's poetry will likely outlast her novel because of its ability to articulate universal truths in a concentrated form. Nevertheless, as a novelist, Emily faced the challenge of crafting a narrative grounded in external reality. In Wuthering Heights, she balances the poetic and the prosaic, achieving moments of unparalleled emotional intensity through seemingly mundane details—a girl singing old songs or the soft rustle of the wind.

Emily's genius lies in her ability to transcend the ordinary. Woolf describes her as possess-

ing the rarest of powers: the capacity to free life from its dependence on facts. With a few strokes of her pen, Emily conjures the spirit of a face or the voice of the moors, making the fictional world of Wuthering Heights as vivid and enduring as reality itself.

This visionary quality sets Wuthering Heights apart from other novels. Its characters and landscapes are not bound by realism but are imbued with a "gust of life" that elevates them to a mythical plane. Heathcliff, Catherine, and the storm-lashed moors become symbols of elemental human passions, achieving a timeless resonance that few other works can match.

Virginia Woolf's analysis of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights presents the brilliance and individuality of the Bronte sisters. Charlotte's work is celebrated for its intensity and emotional force, though it remains confined to a narrower, more personal vision. In contrast, Emily's poetic genius and universal perspective give Wuthering Heights a complexity and grandeur that make it one of the greatest achievements in English literature.

Through their shared use of nature, passionate characters, and poetic sensibilities, the Bronte sisters created worlds that continue to captivate readers. Yet, as Woolf suggests, Emily's ability to transcend the personal and articulate universal truths through her art secures her place as the greater poet and visionary among them.

2.1.3 Analysis of the Essay

In her analysis of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf offers a deep exploration of both novels' thematic complexity, emotional intensity, and their respective authors' literary genius. Woolf contrasts the two sisters' approaches to writing, presenting their shared poetic qualities, while also drawing attention to their distinct narrative voices. The review offers a detailed examination of the ways in which each author used their personal experiences and worldview to craft their novels, as well as their exploration of the human condition through their characters.

Woolf begins by reflecting on Charlotte Bronte's life, and how it shaped her work. The isolated and difficult conditions of Bronte's life—growing up in a parsonage on the Yorkshire moors—are mirrored in her writing. Woolf suggests that *Jane Eyre* is deeply informed by the environment of the moors, with its bleak and harsh landscapes. Yet, despite this, the novel does not feel outdated or antiquated, as one might expect of a work from the mid-Victorian era. Instead, it holds a timeless quality that continues to resonate with readers.

Woolf presents the compelling opening of *Jane Eyre*, where the vivid description of a stormy day displays the emotional tone of the entire novel. This immersive experience, where the reader is absorbed into Jane's world, speaks to Bronte's ability to use language to evoke powerful emotional states. In this way, Bronte's writing goes beyond mere description—it allows the reader to experience Jane's perspective, where the world and its inhabitants exist only through her eyes. As Woolf points out, to think of characters like Rochester or the moors is to think of *Jane Eyre*; the novel is inseparable from its protagonist.

However, Woolf also notes the limitations of the novel. The focus on Jane as both a governess and a lover restricts the scope of her character's experience. Unlike the complex, multifaceted characters of authors like Jane Austen or Tolstoy, Bronte's characters are narrowly defined by their roles in relation to Jane. While this makes for an intense and emotionally charged narrative, it also creates a somewhat one-dimensional world. In con-

trast to novels where characters interact with a broader spectrum of society, the world of *Jane Eyre* is more confined, and the relationships are focused on just a few key characters.

Woolf makes an interesting comparison between Charlotte Bronte and Thomas Hardy, pointing out the similarities in their narrow visions and the intensity of their personalities. Both authors infuse their works with a personal, self-centered view of the world, but while Hardy's novels, like *Jude the Obscure*, offer deep reflections on existential questions and the limitations of the human experience, Bronte's work is more concerned with the expression of emotion—love, suffering, and hate. Woolf suggests that Charlotte Bronte, like Hardy, uses a form of stiff, decorous prose, but she achieves beauty and power in her writing by focusing on personal and intense emotions, which resonate with the reader at a visceral level.

Woolf acknowledges Bronte's inability to offer broader philosophical insights, but asserts that the raw emotional power of *Jane Eyre* more than compensates for this. The novel's intensity, derived from Jane's deep emotional responses, creates a forceful reading experience that captivates and consumes the reader's attention.

When Woolf turns her attention to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, she offers an even deeper admiration for its power and complexity. Woolf contends that Emily was the greater poet of the two Bronte sisters, and that *Wuthering Heights* is a work of profound emotional and poetic depth. Unlike Charlotte, Emily's writing is driven not by personal anguish, but by a broader, more universal vision. Emily is not simply recounting her own emotions but seeking to express a powerful, almost cosmic struggle. The novel's characters are not defined merely by their passions of love or hate but by a sense of something larger—a universal force at play.

The absence of a clear "I" in *Wuthering Heights* creates a sense of detachment from the individual self, unlike the personal intensity of *Jane Eyre*. In *Wuthering Heights*, the characters do not speak simply for themselves; instead, they represent the forces of nature, the passions of the universe. Woolf compares Emily's vision to the notion of a collective, almost mythic struggle—a battle that is not merely about individual suffering but about the human race's eternal struggles and confrontations with the divine or the natural world.

This larger ambition in Emily's writing makes *Wuthering Heights* more difficult to grasp than *Jane Eyre*, according to Woolf. The novel transcends personal emotion and touches upon broader themes of existence, fate, and the metaphysical. The characters' actions are motivated by forces beyond their control, and their relationships seem less about personal choice and more about cosmic inevitability. This gives the novel a grandeur that *Jane Eyre* lacks.

Woolf further analyses Emily's poetic approach to writing, noting how nature in *Wuthering Heights* is not just a backdrop but an extension of the characters' emotions. The moors, the wind, the storms—they are not just external phenomena but active participants in the emotional and psychological drama of the characters. Emily's use of nature as a symbolic device conveys the wildness of the human spirit and its connection to forces larger than itself. This, for Woolf, is where Emily's genius lies: she can free life from its dependence on reality, transforming it into something more elemental and potent.

Whereas Charlotte's descriptions of nature

were tied to character development and emotional expression, Emily's nature scenes transcend character and become vehicles for the novel's broader existential concerns. Woolf admires Emily's ability to create a world that is both physically improbable and emotionally real, in which the characters and their surroundings exist not as parts of a coherent reality, but as expressions of deeper, more universal forces.

Virginia Woolf's analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* offers a detailed and insightful comparison of the two Bronte sisters. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is marked by its emotional intensity and focus on personal suffering, while Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is noted for its universal themes, poetic style, and larger-than-life characters. Woolf praises Emily for her ability to transcend the personal and create a work of profound emotional and philosophical depth, while recognising Charlotte's remarkable ability to evoke intense, personal emotion. Both sisters, in their unique ways, created works that continue to resonate with readers due to their emotional power and timeless themes.

Recap

- Woolf compares Charlotte and Emily Bronte's writing styles and themes
- Both novels evoke strong emotions and poetic imagery
- Charlotte's isolated life shaped *Jane Eyre*, making it timeless
- The opening of *Jane Eyre* draws readers into Jane's world
- *Jane Eyre* ties Jane's perspective to its setting and characters
- Woolf critiques the lack of character complexity in *Jane Eyre*
- Charlotte's writing is compared to Hardy's personal, intense style
- Hardy explores existential questions, while Charlotte focuses on emotion
- Woolf praises Charlotte's emotional depth, despite narrow focus
- Emily is the greater poet, with a more complex *Wuthering Heights*
- Emily's writing expresses universal struggles, not just personal pain.
- *Wuthering Heights* characters represent larger, cosmic forces
- Emily's work explores fate and existence beyond emotion
- *Wuthering Heights* is grander and more universal than *Jane Eyre*
- Emily uses nature symbolically to reflect emotions in *Wuthering Heights*
- Nature in *Wuthering Heights* addresses existential themes
- Emily transcends reality, making her work poetically powerful
- Charlotte uses nature for emotional depth; Emily uses it metaphysically
- Emily's poetic vision makes *Wuthering Heights* timeless
- Emily's universal truths establish her as the greater poet

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *Jane Eyre*?
2. Which novel *Jane Eyre or Wuthering Heights* is considered to have a more universal perspective, according to Woolf?
3. Which Bronte sister does Woolf consider the greater poet?
4. In which novel is nature used as an extension of the characters' emotions?
5. What is the key limitation Woolf identifies in *Jane Eyre*?
6. What does Woolf say about Charlotte Bronte's writing style?
7. Which other writer does Woolf compare Charlotte Bronte to?
8. What key characteristic of *Jane Eyre* does Woolf praise?
9. What aspect of Emily Bronte's writing does Woolf admire the most?
10. Which novel does Woolf describe as having a "gigantic ambition"?
11. What does Woolf suggest about the relationship between *Wuthering Heights* and reality?
12. Which novel does Woolf regard as having a greater philosophical depth?
13. What is the dominant element in *Wuthering Heights* according to Woolf?
14. What feature of Charlotte Bronte's writing does Woolf critique?
15. Which literary technique does Emily Bronte use in *Wuthering Heights* to elevate the novel?

Answers

1. Charlotte Bronte
2. Wuthering Heights
3. Emily Bronte
4. Wuthering Heights
5. Narrow focus on Jane's role as a governess and lover
6. Intensely personal and focused on emotional intensity
7. Thomas Hardy
8. Emotional intensity
9. Her ability to transcend personal emotion and capture universal themes
10. Wuthering Heights
11. The novel transcends realism and creates a world of emotional resonance
12. Wuthering Heights
13. Poeticism
14. Limited scope
15. Symbolism

Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the narrative techniques used by Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* and Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights*, as discussed by Virginia Woolf.
2. Why does Woolf consider *Wuthering Heights* more complex than *Jane Eyre*? What makes Emily's novel more universal in its themes?
3. How do the Bronte sisters use nature in their novels to reflect emotional turmoil, and how does Woolf distinguish their approaches?
4. How do the Bronte sisters use nature in their novels to reflect emotional turmoil, and how does Woolf distinguish their approaches?
5. How does the poetic quality of Emily's writing in *Wuthering Heights* impact the reader's experience, as discussed by Woolf?

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BLOCK - 03

Poetry

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Unit 1

Daddy

-Sylvia Plath

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify and discuss the central themes in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy"
- analyse how historical events are used to convey the depth of the speaker's emotional turmoil and the universality of oppression
- interpret the psychoanalytic aspects of the poem
- explore the impact of the speaker's complex relationship with authority, oppression, and patriarchal figures

Prerequisites

Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" is not just a poem; it is a volcanic eruption—a ferocious outpouring of grief, fury, and defiance. How does one reconcile love and hatred for a figure as monumental as a father, a man who looms over the psyche like a giant, casting shadows long after death? Plath does not tiptoe around this question; she attacks it head-on, wielding her words like weapons, cutting through the layers of pain and oppression. Her metaphors burn, her imagery shocks, and her tone dares us to look away. But can we? Can we ignore the searing intensity of a woman exorcising the ghosts that haunt her, the father-turned-demon who demands reckoning? "Daddy" is no quiet lament; it is a battle cry—a declaration of war against the chains of memory, the tyranny of patriarchy, and the suffocating grip of grief. Through it, Plath demands not only her liberation but ours as well. Will we rise to meet her challenge, or will we retreat, unwilling to confront our own shadows?

Keywords

Confessional poetry, Trauma, Oppression, Liberation, Father-daughter relationship, Holocaust, Emotional abuse

3.1.1 Discussion

Sylvia Plath, a young and passionate American writer known for her intensely personal literature, struggled throughout her life with mental health issues. A gifted student, she began writing at an early age. The death of her father when she was just eight profoundly influenced both her writing and mental well-being. Among her most notable works published during her lifetime are *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and the semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* (1963), initially released under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. However, it was the posthumous publication of *Ariel* (1965) that brought her widespread recognition.

Plath battled severe depression, attempting suicide in 1953 and 1962, before tragically ending her life in 1963 at the age of 30 by placing her head in an oven. She was married to renowned poet Ted Hughes, whose alleged infidelity is believed to have worsened her mental health. After her death, Hughes edited and compiled her poems written between 1956 and 1963, publishing *The Collected Poems* in 1981. The collection won a Pulitzer Prize the following year.

Plath was a leading figure in confessional poetry, a literary movement that emphasised the personal and autobiographical. Confessional poetry often explores topics traditionally considered taboo, such as mental illness, relationships, and family dynamics. This genre exposes the poet's inner thoughts and feelings, drawing readers into the depths of their emotional struggles. Plath lived during mid-20th-century America and was acquainted with prominent writers such as Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton, both of whom shared her confessional style of poetry. Plath and Sexton were students of Lowell, whose work *Life Studies* inspired the term "confessional poetry," coined by critic M. L. Rosenthal in his review *Poetry as Confession.* Other key confessional poets included W. D. Snodgrass and John Berryman. Tragically, Anne Sexton also died by suicide in 1974.

Plath's contemporary literary landscape was vibrant, with writers like Adrienne Rich, a leading feminist poet, and Harper Lee, author of the iconic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird.* The 1960s were a flourishing period for literature, encompassing poetry, novels, essays, and plays, which further contextualised Plath's creative output.

"Daddy" is a poem written during one of the darkest periods of Sylvia Plath's life. At the time of its composition, Plath was a recently separated woman living alone with her children, and no one could have predicted that she was just four months away from her tragic suicide. The poem was published posthumously in the collection *Ariel.* "Daddy" vividly expresses the anger and pain Plath endured due to the men in her life, particularly her oppressive father and unfaithful husband. The central figure of the poem, however, is her German-immigrant father, whose influence looms large over her life and work. This raw, confessional style, exemplified in "Daddy," is what makes Plath's work resonate so deeply, laying bare the emotional turbulence that defined her life.

3.1.1.1 Summary of the Poem

Stanza 1

You do not do, you do not do

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

The poem opens with Plath declaring her exhaustion from living like a foot trapped inside a "black shoe." For thirty years, she endured this stifling confinement, barely able to breathe or even "Achoo." The word "Achoo," an example of onomatopoeia, mimics the sound of a sneeze and presents her restricted existence – so oppressed that even a natural, involuntary action like sneezing felt constrained. The use of this childlike expression, reminiscent of nursery rhymes, creates a stark contrast with the poem's dark themes, amplifying the sense of loss and confinement.

The "black shoe" symbolises her father, whose authoritarian presence loomed large over her life despite his death when she was only eight years old. The image evokes both oppression and claustrophobia, reflecting how his memory and influence continued to dominate her psyche for three decades. This metaphor presents Plath's struggle with the loss of freedom and individual identity, as she lived under the shadow of his strictness and unresolved emotional impact. Through these vivid and layered symbols, Plath introduces the reader to the central themes of "Daddy" – her longing for liberation and the anguish of a life overshadowed by a controlling paternal figure.

Stanza 2

Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time——

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

The poet boldly declares that she had to "kill" her father, a statement reflecting her deep pain and anger. This symbolic "killing" represents her need to overcome his domineering influence by mentally "slaying" his memories. However, the following line reveals a complex mix of regret and disappointment, as she laments that he "died before (she) had time." The unfinished thought suggests an unfulfilled desire to reconcile, confront, or perhaps make him proud, tinged with a subtle tone of remorse.

She describes her father as "marble-heavy," a metaphor that conveys the oppressive burden of his legacy and influence. Marble, a cold, hard, and unyielding material, symbolises her perception of him as rigid, emotionally distant, and unapproachable. The weight of this "marble-heavy" influence suggests a responsibility or presence that is nearly impossible to carry or escape.

The phrase "a bag full of God" evokes his god-like authority and the complex inheritance he left her. This "bag" symbolises both a valuable legacy and the weight of responsibility it entails – cultural, familial, or emotional. It represents the duality of his influence: something that could be cherished yet remains a source of immense pressure and unresolved feelings.

Plath intensifies the imagery by comparing him to a "ghastly statue" with a "gray toe big as a Frisco seal." The grotesque enormity of the statue and the hyperbolic description of the toe presents his overwhelming, almost monstrous presence in her life. This image highlights her feelings of being overshadowed by his memory, as though his influence loomed like a colossal monument she could never escape.

Through these vivid metaphors and descriptions, Plath communicates the profound impact of her father's legacy on her psyche – simultaneously a source of pain, reverence, and a crushing burden. This layered portrayal reveals her struggle to grapple with the conflicting emotions tied to her father and his indelible mark on her life.

Stanza 3

And a head in the freakish Atlantic

Where it pours bean green over blue

In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

I used to pray to recover you.

Ach, du.

The statue Plath describes is immense, with its head in the Atlantic and its toes in the Pacific (referencing San Francisco). This exaggerated image portrays her father as a colossal figure spanning the entire United States, symbolising the overpowering influence he holds over her mind. The head of the statue rests in the "freakish Atlantic," where the water is described as "bean green over blue." The coastal reference evokes Eastham, Massachusetts, where Plath spent her summers as a child. The nearby Nauset beach and its historic lighthouse, described as "beautiful," create a sense of irony when juxtaposed with the dark and intense themes of the poem. While Nauset's natural beauty contrasts starkly with Plath's emotional turmoil, it also serves as a poignant backdrop for the poem's exploration of memory and loss.

Water, a recurring symbol in Plath's poetry, often represents subconscious emotions and the complexities of human experience. Here, the Atlantic's shifting colors suggest the depth and turbulence of her inner life, reflecting the profound impact of her father's death and lingering presence. The poet reveals that she once prayed for her father's recovery, a poignant admission that presents the complex love-hate relationship between them. This moment of vulnerability underscores her lingering hope to reconnect with him, despite the pain he caused.

In line with her father's German roots, Plath ends the stanza with the German phrase "Ach, du" (meaning "oh, you"). This phrase encompasses her emotional shift from the U.S. to Europe, as the poem's setting transitions in the next stanza to a Polish town. The multilingual element enriches the poem's exploration of identity, heritage, and the enduring influence of her father's legacy. Through this vivid imagery and layered symbolism, Plath continues to reveal the profound psychological weight she carries and the intricate emotions that define her relationship with her father.

Stanza 4

In the German tongue, in the Polish town

Scraped flat by the roller

Of wars, wars, wars.

But the name of the town is common.

My Polack friend

In the fourth stanza, the setting shifts from the picturesque coastal cities of the U.S. to a war-torn Polish town in Europe. This town, repeatedly ravaged by war, is likened to an object flattened by a roller. Plath explains that the town's name is so common in Poland that there are several with the same name, making it nearly impossible to trace familial roots. As her father was a German immigrant from one of these towns, the poet expresses confusion and frustration in trying to pinpoint his origins amidst this ambiguity.

Stanza 5

Says there are a dozen or two.

So I never could tell where you

Put your foot, your root,

I never could talk to you.

The tongue stuck in my jaw.

The speaker expresses frustration and helplessness in connecting with her father, describing him as elusive and overpowering. She feels unable to communicate with him, as if her tongue is immobilised, emphasising the emotional and psychological barriers in their relationship.

Stanza 6

It stuck in a barb wire snare.

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

I could hardly speak.

I thought every German was you.

And the language obscene

The inability to communicate with her father was deeply painful for Plath, as she uses the image of a tongue caught in barbed wire to convey her distress. The line "Ich, ich, ich, ich" mimics the sound of a tongue struggling to form words, with "Ich" meaning "I" in German. This stammer reflects her inability to say anything beyond "I...I...I" to her father. Since her father's native language was German and hers was English, a language barrier likely compounded her struggle. Combined with her fear of her father, this gap left her stuttering for words. Plath expresses her frustration through harsh imagery, describing seeing her father's image in every German she encountered and even calling the German language obscene. This reveals how her strained relationship with her father affected her broader social interactions.

Stanza 7

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew.

A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I may well be a Jew.

The absence of punctuation in the last line of the sixth stanza reflects the poet's continued relentless critique of the German language. She describes it as an engine "chuffing" her off like a Jew, using "chuffing," an onomatopoeic word, to mimic the sound of a train engine. Plath compares her fraught relationship with the German language to the inhumane treatment of Jews by the Nazis. Historically, during World War II, Nazis transported Jews to concentration camps like Dachau, Auschwitz, and Belsen via trains, where they faced unimaginable suffering and death. Plath's hatred for the German language is so intense that she likens her experience to a Jew being transported to these camps. She claims she began to speak like a Jew and suggests she could very well be one, establishing a metaphorical parallel between her relationship with her father and that of the persecuted Jews and their Nazi persecutors.

Stanza 8

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna

Are not very pure or true.

With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck

And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack

I may be a bit of a Jew.

In Stanza 8, the poet challenges notions of racial and cultural purity, using examples like the "snows of the Tyrol" and the "clear beer

of Vienna," which are not "very pure or true." Tyrol, a multicultural region in Austria, and Vienna's beer, influenced by diverse brewing traditions, symbolise the complex and blended nature of identity. These examples parallel the poet's own exploration of her identity, which she acknowledges as equally multifaceted.

The mention of her "gipsy ancestress" and "weird luck" suggests a connection to a mystical, nomadic heritage, which she associates with her unconventional life path. The repetition of "my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack" presents this mystical theme, as tarot cards often represent intuition, mysticism, and the search for hidden truths. This could symbolise her desire to uncover the secrets of her past and her connection to her father, reflecting her ongoing struggle to understand her identity and heritage.

The line "I may be a bit of a Jew" further complicates this exploration, referring to her father's Jewish heritage and the ambiguity of her own identity. It presents her sense of uncertainty and her questioning of social labels and expectations. By juxtaposing this with her father's Aryan identity – a term co-opted by the Nazis to signify racial purity – the poet critiques the absurdity of such notions and shows the fragmented, multifaceted nature of identity.

Stanza 9

I have always been scared of you,

With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.

And your neat mustache

And your Aryan eye, bright blue.

Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——

In this stanza, the poet directly addresses her father, confessing that she has always been afraid of him. She was intimidated by his militaristic presence, his Hitler-like mustache, and his idealized Aryan blue eyes. The word "Luftwaffe" means air force in German, and Plath pairs it with the invented term "gobbledygoo" to emphasize how absurd and foreign her father's German sounded to her. "Panzer" refers to armored vehicles, and "panzer-man" denotes German tank drivers, further reinforcing her father's militaristic nature. These images suggest he was a German sympathizer, likely holding pro-Nazi views. The phrase "O You" in the final line echoes "Ach du" from the third stanza, creating cohesion in the poem.

Stanza 10

Not God but a swastika

So black no sky could squeak through.

Every woman adores a Fascist,

The boot in the face, the brute

Brute heart of a brute like you.

Earlier in the poem, the poet viewed her father as having a godly stature, comparing him to a colossal statue. However, by this point, he has transformed in her mind into a large swastika, a symbol of Nazi ideology and the horrors of the Holocaust. This evil emblem is so dark that it blocks out any light, replacing the notion of a benevolent, godlike father figure with an oppressive and destructive force. By associating her father with the swastika, the poet implies that his behaviour and attitudes were similarly cruel, authoritarian, and devastating.

The phrase "boot in the face" is a stark and disturbing representation of violence and oppression, symbolising the crushing of individuality and the speaker's sense of powerlessness. She feels trapped and unable to escape the oppressive control represented by her father, a man who embodies the brutality of

a Fascist regime. The poet critiques not only her father's actions but also a broader pattern of male violence and female subjugation, suggesting that women are often drawn to oppressive, abusive men.

The line "brute heart of a brute like you" further dehumanises her father, reducing him to a "brute" with no capacity for empathy or compassion. Her words are a scathing condemnation of his behaviour, reflecting her deep anger, resentment, and the emotional scars left by his influence. This raw and unflinching portrayal captures the speaker's transition from reverence to rebellion, as she dismantles the oppressive image of her father and exposes the pain he caused. These lines present the poet's disdain for violence and oppression, transforming her personal experience into a powerful critique of patriarchal cruelty.

Stanza 11

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,

In the picture I have of you,

A cleft in your chin instead of your foot

But no less a devil for that, no not

Any less the black man who

The speaker envisions her father at a blackboard, noting a cleft in his chin instead of a foot, but still perceiving him as a devil. The imagery suggests a deeply negative and demonic view of him, displaying her emotional turmoil and the lasting, oppressive impact of his presence in her life.

Stanza 12

Bit my pretty red heart in two.

I was ten when they buried you.

At twenty I tried to die

And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do.

The speaker reflects on her deep emotional pain caused by her father's death, which she likens to her heart being broken. She recalls attempting suicide at twenty, longing to reunite with him, even if only with his bones. The lines reveal her intense grief and unresolved longing.

Stanza 13

But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue.

And then I knew what to do.

I made a model of you,

A man in black with a Meinkampf look

The speaker describes being metaphorically "pulled out of the sack," an image suggesting a traumatic birth or violent separation from a safe, enclosed space. This act symbolises her sense of disconnection from her own identity, as though she has been forcibly removed from a state of unity and wholeness. The next line, "And they stuck me together with glue," implies a crude and artificial reconstruction of her identity. Rather than feeling whole, the speaker experiences a fragmented sense of self, held together by external forces rather than an internal, cohesive identity.

"And then I knew what to do" suggests that after this forced reassembly, the speaker was conditioned to conform to social expectations and norms. This line hints at a loss of autonomy, as though her decisions are no longer her own but dictated by external pressures.

The speaker goes on to "make a model" of her father, reconstructing him in her mind as "a man in black with a Meinkampf look." This man, dressed ominously and embodying Nazi ideology, reflects her internalised image of her father as a symbol of tyranny and dominance. By creating this model, the speaker confronts the oppressive and authoritarian figure that has loomed over her psyche. The reconstruction serves as both an act of defiance and a grim acknowledgment of how deeply his influence has shaped her fragmented identity. Through this vivid imagery, Plath connects her personal trauma to broader themes of oppression and the loss of individuality.

Stanza 14

And a love of the rack and the screw.

And I said I do, I do.

So daddy, I'm finally through.

The black telephone's off at the root,

The voices just can't worm through.

The speaker describes enduring torment symbolised by the "rack and the screw," suggesting prolonged suffering in her relationship with her father. Despite this, she confesses to having once accepted it ("I do, I do"). However, she now declares her liberation, severing ties with him by metaphorically disconnecting the "black telephone," cutting off his oppressive influence and silencing the haunting voices of her past. This marks her final break from the pain he caused.

Stanza 15

If I've killed one man, I've killed two——

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

Seven years, if you want to know.

Daddy, you can lie back now.

The poet declares that she has "killed" two men: her father and, metaphorically, her husband, whom she refers to as a vampire. This vampire claimed to be like her father, suggesting that both men shared similar oppressive traits. The poet projects the trauma of her paternal relationship onto her marital one, mentioning that her husband metaphorically "drank her blood" for seven years, possibly alluding to their troubled relationship. She abruptly shifts focus back to her father, sarcastically telling him to "lie back and relax," but this is not out of concern. The poem takes a dramatic and intense turn in its conclusion.

Stanza 16

There's a stake in your fat black heart

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always knew it was you.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

The poet reveals that she told her father to "lie back" so she could pierce his heart with a wooden stake, adhering to the vampire archetype. This method, often associated with killing vampires, symbolises her final act of severing his oppressive influence. She describes villagers dancing and stamping on his body, which can be interpreted as the voices and thoughts in her mind celebrating her liberation. While she may have blamed herself for her depression, she acknowledges that her father was the real source of her turmoil. She concludes her furious tirade by cursing him and firmly declaring her freedom from his hold.

3.1.1.2 Analysis

Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" is a complex,

raw, and emotionally charged exploration of a tumultuous father-daughter relationship. Written during a time of personal turmoil in Plath's life, the poem blends autobiographical elements with historical and cultural allusions to create a powerful depiction of trauma, anger, and liberation.

At its core, "Daddy" addresses themes of oppression, loss, and identity. Plath uses the figure of the father to symbolise patriarchal domination, emotional abuse, and the unkind men in her life, including her husband. The father becomes an overarching metaphor for authority, embodying a toxic influence that haunts her psyche. Through her portrayal, Plath confronts the lingering power dynamics and psychological scars imposed by her father and husband.

The poem also explores the theme of freedom, as Plath attempts to liberate herself from these oppressive forces. The act of writing becomes an act of defiance and cleansing, allowing her to reclaim agency over her life and emotions.

The tone of the poem is simultaneously confessional and accusatory. Plath's language is bold, visceral, and provocative, reflecting the intensity of her emotional struggles. Her use of short, sharp phrases mirrors the stuttering of someone struggling to articulate deep pain. The repetition of "daddy" evokes the infantilisation and dependence she felt toward her father, while also sarcastically mocking his oppressive control.

Plath employs a free-verse structure, which allows the poem to flow with the spontaneity of spoken language, enhancing its emotional immediacy. The rhyming pattern, reminiscent of nursery rhymes, creates a chilling juxtaposition between childlike innocence and the dark themes of abuse and resentment.

Plath's vivid and sometimes shocking imagery is central to the poem's power. The metaphor of the father as a black shoe in which she has lived stifled for thirty years represents his overbearing presence. The shift to a vampire metaphor later in the poem signifies the draining effect of her father and husband, merging the two figures into one oppressive force.

The Holocaust imagery, though controversial, underscores the magnitude of Plath's personal suffering. Comparing her relationship with her father to the persecution of Jews by Nazis conveys the depth of her pain and the psychological tyranny she endured. The recurring motif of the train, the swastika, and the concentration camps enhances the sense of dehumanization and helplessness she felt under his influence.

The use of Holocaust references has drawn criticism, with some accusing Plath of trivialising historical trauma to articulate personal grief. However, critics like James E. Young argue that such imagery reflects the cultural memory of her era, emphasising the universality of oppression and pain. Plath's confessional style allows readers to empathize with her suffering while raising questions about the boundaries between personal and collective trauma.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Daddy can be read as a confrontation with unresolved oedipal conflicts. The poem reflects Plath's attempt to reconcile her love-hate relationship with her father, whose premature death left an indelible mark on her psyche. By projecting her feelings onto the figure of her father and blending it with her failed marriage, Plath externalizes her inner turmoil, ultimately seeking closure.

The poem employs a rich array of poetic devices to convey the speaker's tumultuous re-

lationship with her father and the lingering psychological scars of his dominance. Metaphor is a central device, as seen in the "black shoe" symbolising suffocating oppression and the "marble-heavy" weight of his legacy. Onomatopoeia, like "Achoo," evokes a constrained existence, while stark imagery, such as the "gray toe big as a Frisco seal," emphasises his overwhelming presence. Plath uses allusion to Nazi Germany, referencing Dachau, Auschwitz, and Belsen to draw parallels between her father's authoritarian influence and historical tyranny, intensifying the poem's themes of oppression and rebellion. Hyperbole, as in the description of her father as a colossal statue with his head in the Atlantic, presents his overpowering impact on her psyche. Repetition, such as "Ich, ich, ich, ich," mimics stammering, reflecting her struggle to articulate her pain and confront her past. The poem's dark tone is amplified through juxtaposition, contrasting childlike phrases like "Achoo" with brutal themes of violence and loss. Plath's use of symbolism, including the "black telephone" severing ties, and the vampire imagery of blood-drinking, showcases her ultimate rejection of his legacy. Through these devices, Plath crafts a vivid, multifaceted exploration of identity, trauma, and liberation.

"Daddy" is a masterpiece of confessional poetry that intertwines personal anguish with universal themes of oppression and liberation. Plath's raw emotions, vivid imagery, and bold language transform the poem into a timeless exploration of trauma and healing. Despite its controversy for provocative symbolism, "Daddy" presents Plath's remarkable ability to channel profound pain into a powerful and transformative creative expression.

Recap

- "Daddy" was written during one of Sylvia Plath's darkest periods, shortly before her death
- The poem vividly expresses anger and pain caused by her father and unfaithful husband
- The central figure, her German-immigrant father, looms large over her life and work
- Plath uses powerful imagery, such as a black shoe and vampire, to convey oppression
- Holocaust symbolism controversially highlights her feelings of dehumanisation and tyranny
- The poem reflects unresolved oedipal conflicts and merges her father's and husband's traits
- Written in free verse with nursery-rhyme tones, it juxtaposes innocence with dark themes
- "Daddy" explores liberation and healing through a cathartic creative process
- Critics debate the use of Holocaust imagery but acknowledge its cultural resonance

- The poem stands as a confessional masterpiece of trauma, anger, and ultimate self-liberation

Objective Questions

1. During which period of Sylvia Plath's life was "Daddy" written?
2. What major life event had recently occurred when Plath wrote "Daddy"?
3. In which collection was "Daddy" published posthumously?
4. What does the "black shoe" in the poem symbolize?
5. What is the significance of the line "Daddy, I have had to kill you"?
6. Which historical references are used in the poem to symbolize Plath's feelings of oppression?
7. What is the significance of the stanza mentioning "Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen"?
8. How does the poem describe the father's image?
9. What does the "vampire" metaphor in the poem symbolise?
10. How does Plath describe her psychological struggle with her father's influence?
11. What literary style is "Daddy" primarily associated with?
12. How does the poem end?
13. What role does the metaphor of the "black telephone" play in the poem?
14. What thematic element is prominent in "Daddy"?
15. Why has "Daddy" been criticised by some literary scholars?

Answers

1. During one of the darkest periods of her life
2. Her separation from her husband
3. *Ariel*
4. A symbol of her father's oppressive influence
5. It symbolises her effort to mentally overcome her father's oppressive memory
6. Holocaust imagery and Nazi symbolism
7. It compares her personal suffering to the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust

8. As a cold, oppressive figure with a god-like presence
9. The oppressive traits of her father and husband
10. As being stuck in a “barbed wire snare”
11. Confessional poetry
12. With a declaration of liberation and anger
13. It represents severing her connection to her father’s oppressive influence
14. The tension between oppression and liberation
15. For its use of Holocaust imagery to describe personal trauma

Assignments

1. Analyse the use of imagery in “Daddy” and its significance in conveying Sylvia Plath’s emotional turmoil.
2. In “Daddy,” Sylvia Plath uses historical and cultural references, such as Holocaust imagery and references to Nazi ideology. How does this intertwining of personal pain and historical trauma affect the reader's interpretation of the poem?
3. Discuss the role of liberation in Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy.” How does the poet use the act of “killing” her father to symbolise her attempt to free herself from his oppressive influence?
4. Examine the psychoanalytic elements present in “Daddy.”
5. How does Plath's use of language and tone in “Daddy” contribute to the poem’s confessional and accusatory nature?

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Unit 2

Phenomenal Woman

-Maya Angelou

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- familiarise themselves with the poem of Maya Angelou and its themes
- identify and explain the central themes of self-confidence, empowerment, and the celebration of individuality
- evaluate Angelou's use of literary devices, including vivid imagery, rhythm, and metaphors, to convey her message of inner beauty and strength
- critically discuss how Angelou challenges traditional social standards of beauty and advocates for self-acceptance and pride in personal identity

Prerequisites

Imagine a voice so powerful that it weaves resilience, dignity, and hope into every word – a voice that not only speaks to the soul but uplifts it. That is the voice of Maya Angelou, a literary legend whose works continue to inspire generations. As a poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist, Angelou transformed her life's trials and triumphs into a universal language of empowerment and self-love. Her poem *"Phenomenal Woman"* is not merely a composition of words; it is a celebration – a bold declaration of the beauty, strength, and grace inherent in womanhood. With unapologetic confidence, Angelou dismantles social beauty standards, challenging the superficial and celebrating what lies within: the fire, joy, and pride that make a woman truly phenomenal.

Angelou's voice, however, also resonates deeply within the context of Black feminism, a movement that seeks to address the unique struggles of Black women, emphasising their agency and challenging both racial and gender inequalities. Black feminism rejects the marginalisation of Black women's experiences, focusing on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. It calls for the empowerment of women of African descent, celebrating their strength and advocating for their rights. Angelou's work embodies this ethos, as her words not only empower women but uplift Black women in particular, giving them the space to assert their worth and redefine their identities.

Today, as we explore Angelou's language and the profound themes of her poem, let us not merely analyse its verses but allow ourselves to feel its rhythm – a rhythm that echoes with the unyielding spirit of a phenomenal woman.

Keywords

Self-worth, Confidence, Inner strength, Empowerment, Self-love, Beauty standards

3.1.2 Discussion

Maya Angelou, a luminous voice in modern literature, stands as a towering figure whose words resonate with resilience, dignity, and empowerment. A poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist, Angelou's life itself is a testament to the power of courage and self-expression. From her humble beginnings in the segregated South to her rise as a global icon, she carved a path defined by unyielding determination and boundless creativity. Her poetry is a tapestry woven with threads of her struggles and triumphs, blending the personal with the universal, the pain of injustice with the beauty of hope.

Angelou's works, such as *Phenomenal Woman* and *Still I Rise*, are not merely verses; they are anthems of defiance and self-celebration, giving voice to the voiceless and celebrating the indomitable spirit of Black womanhood. Her mastery of language transcends barriers, blending lyricism and rhythm to craft poetry that is both accessible and profoundly moving. With each line, she invites readers not only to witness her journey but to find strength within their own. Angelou's legacy is more than her art; it is a call to embrace humanity, to rise above adversity, and to find grace in every struggle.

3.1.2.1 Summary of the Poem

Stanza 1

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.

I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size

But when I start to tell them,

They think I'm telling lies.

I say,

It's in the reach of my arms,

The span of my hips,

The stride of my step,

The curl of my lips.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

The speaker in "Phenomenal Woman" boldly asserts that her beauty is not defined by conventional standards, such as being "cute" or having a model's figure. Instead, her strength lies in her self-assurance, presence, grace, and confidence. These qualities, not physical appearance, define her beauty.

"I am a woman" is a simple yet powerful statement of identity, claiming space and presence. The word "phenomenally" emphasises the extraordinary nature of the speaker's womanhood, reinforcing that she is exceptional and remarkable. By describing herself as a "Phenomenal Woman," she challenges traditional notions of beauty and femininity, focusing on strength and resilience rather than superficial standards.

This declaration is an act of self-love and acceptance, promoting a positive, empowering self-image. The speaker's beauty comes from within, emphasizing confidence, inner strength, and self-assurance as the true markers of womanhood, celebrating the unique qualities that make her powerful.

Stanza 2

I walk into a room

Just as cool as you please,

And to a man,

The fellows stand or

Fall down on their knees.

Then they swarm around me,

A hive of honey bees.

I say,

It's the fire in my eyes,

And the flash of my teeth,

The swing in my waist,

And the joy in my feet.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

In Stanza 2, the speaker confidently enters a room, radiating a powerful presence that commands attention. The men around her are captivated, either standing in awe or falling to their knees. Their reactions are likened to a "hive of honeybees," symbolising the speaker's magnetic energy. Honeybees represent hard work, resilience, and community, and in this metaphor, they reflect the speaker's inner strength and confidence. The hive also evokes the idea of collective power – just as bees work together for the greater good, the speaker draws from her heritage, culture, and community to fuel her sense of self.

The image of the honeybees suggests that the speaker is not only admired but can become a formidable force when threatened. This evokes her growing self-awareness and the strength she draws from her unapologetic sense of identity. Her effect is not based on traditional standards of beauty but on the fire in her eyes, the flash of her teeth, the swing of her waist, and the joy in her feet. These unique qualities, rather than physical appearance, define her allure. Ultimately, the speaker declares herself a "phenomenal woman," celebrating her self-love, confidence, and inner strength.

Stanza 3

Men themselves have wondered

What they see in me.

They try so much

But they can't touch

My inner mystery.

When I try to show them,

They say they still can't see.

I say,

It's in the arch of my back,

The sun of my smile,

The ride of my breasts,

The grace of my style.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

In Stanza 3 of Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman," the speaker reflects on the mysterious allure that others perceive in her, one that they are unable to fully grasp or explain. Men are intrigued by her presence, yet despite their attempts to understand what makes her captivating, they cannot touch the essence of her inner strength. The speaker reveals that her charm is not based on conventional standards of beauty but rather in the qualities that radiate from within. The "arch of my back" symbolises confidence, pride, and resilience, a physical manifestation of her inner power. The "sun of my smile" evokes warmth and joy, presenting the brightness of her spirit and the genuine positivity she exudes. The "ride of my breasts" represents a celebration of her femininity, freedom, and empowerment, with the word "ride" suggesting movement and liberation. Lastly, the "grace of my style" shows her elegance and unique presence, which cannot be defined by traditional ideals of beauty. Together, these physical features reflect the speaker's unapologetic sense of self and the strength she embodies. Her beauty and power stem not from external appearances but from the confidence and pride she carries within her. By declaring herself a "phenomenal woman," she reaffirms her uniqueness and celebrates the inner qualities that make her truly exceptional. Her confidence, resilience, and self-awareness define her in a way that transcends superficial beauty.

Stanza 4

Now you understand

Just why my head's not bowed.

I don't shout or jump about

Or have to talk real loud.

When you see me passing,

It ought to make you proud.

I say,

It's in the click of my heels,

The bend of my hair,

the palm of my hand,

The need for my care.

'Cause I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

In Stanza 4 of *"Phenomenal Woman,"* the speaker proudly asserts her self-worth and empowerment, emphasising that her strength is not demonstrated through loud or overt actions. Rather, it is found in the subtle, graceful movements of her body – the "click of my heels," the "bend of my hair," and the "palm of my hand." These details symbolise her confidence, poise, and the care she extends to others. The speaker's declaration that "when you see me passing, it ought to make you proud" is a powerful statement of her self-love and resilience. She acknowledges her visibility and asserts that her mere presence should inspire pride – not just for herself, but for those who witness her passing. This line presents the essence of self-empowerment, where the speaker's worth is not defined by external validation but by her own recognition of her

value. Her pride is not based on conforming to social expectations but on embracing her unique identity as a "Phenomenal Woman." She walks through the world with grace and confidence, and in doing so, she affirms her strength, resilience, and undeniable power. The speaker's sense of self is unshaken, and her very existence is a declaration of pride and empowerment.

3.1.2.2 Analysis

Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" is a powerful declaration of self-worth and a celebration of the strength that comes from embracing one's unique qualities. Through vivid imagery, confident tone, and a refusal to conform to traditional standards of beauty, Angelou presents the concept of self-love, womanhood, and inner power. The poem serves as a rejection of the superficial definitions of beauty and instead asserts that true beauty is found in confidence, grace, and authenticity.

In the first stanza of "Phenomenal Woman", the speaker confidently asserts that her beauty is not defined by conventional standards. She acknowledges that she is not "cute" or "built to suit a fashion model's size," which immediately challenges the social notion that beauty is confined to a specific, often unrealistic, physical ideal. This rejection of traditional beauty standards is central to the poem's message. Instead of focusing on appearance, the speaker places emphasis on her inner strength, which manifests in her unique physical qualities. She refers to the "reach of my arms," the "span of my hips," and the "curl of my lips," showing that her beauty comes from her confidence, self-assurance, and presence. These physical attributes, though they may not fit societal standards, represent the power she exudes, which is rooted in her self-acceptance. The speaker's declaration that she is a "Phenomenal Woman" asserts that her beauty is not determined by external factors but by the way she embraces her individuality and power.

The second stanza builds upon the speaker's rejection of traditional beauty by focusing on her compelling presence. When she enters a room, her confidence and grace are so overwhelming that she captures the attention of the men around her. The speaker notes that they either "stand or fall down on their knees," comparing their reaction to a swarm of "honey bees" drawn to her. This metaphor emphasises her magnetic energy and allure, which is not based on her physical appearance, but rather on her self-assurance and inner strength. The speaker attributes her captivating presence to the "fire in my eyes," the "flash of my teeth," and the "joy in my feet." These are not features that can be captured in a mirror or measured by conventional standards of beauty. Instead, they signify the vitality, spirit, and inner joy that emanate from the speaker. Through these vivid descriptions, Angelou suggests that true beauty is not just what is seen on the surface but what is felt and experienced through a person's energy and self-expression.

In the third stanza, the speaker reflects on the mystery of her allure, which others try but fail to understand. Men "wonder" what they see in her, but their attempts to explain it fall short. They cannot grasp the depth of her inner strength and beauty, no matter how much they try. The speaker attributes this to the intangible qualities that define her: the "arch of my back," the "sun of my smile," and the "grace of my style." While these physical attributes may be noticeable, they are merely outward expressions of the deeper confidence and power that reside within her. Her charm and beauty lie in the way she carries herself, the energy she radiates, and the way she embraces her identity. The speaker's inner strength is what makes her "phenomenal." Angelou pres-

ents a vision of womanhood that is not confined to external beauty or social expectations but is rooted in a woman's self-awareness, dignity, and pride.

The final stanza brings together the themes of self-assurance, pride, and empowerment. The speaker's strength is not expressed through loud or overt actions; instead, it is embodied in the "click of my heels," the "bend of my hair," and the "palm of my hand." These subtle, graceful movements show that confidence does not require a spectacle; it is present in every aspect of the speaker's being. She makes it clear that she doesn't need to shout, jump around, or draw attention in any dramatic way to prove her worth. Her self-assurance is enough to command respect and admiration. The speaker concludes by explaining that her beauty, power, and sense of worth come from within, and those who see her should be proud of her presence, which symbolises strength, dignity, and authenticity.

Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" is more than just a celebration of womanhood; it is an affirmation of the power of self-love, inner strength, and confidence. By rejecting conventional standards of beauty and embracing a more holistic and empowering definition of attractiveness, Angelou challenges readers to recognise that true beauty lies not in outward appearance but in the strength of character and the authenticity of one's presence. Through the poem's imagery, structure, and themes, Angelou conveys a message of empowerment that transcends the superficial and encourages women to embrace their own "phenomenal" qualities with pride and confidence.

Maya Angelou uses various figures of speech to enhance the poem's themes of self-empowerment, resilience, and inner strength. One of the most powerful devices is metaphor, as seen in the phrase "a hive of honeybees." This metaphor symbolises the magnetic energy of the speaker, capturing the attention and admiration of others, much like bees to a hive. The "arch of my back" metaphorically represents the speaker's confidence and pride, while "the sun of my smile" evokes warmth, radiance, and inner beauty, suggesting that her allure is not based on external appearance but on her inner strength.

The poem also utilises simile to convey deeper meaning. The comparison of the speaker's smile to the sun emphasises her radiant, joyous spirit. Similarly, imagery is abundant, with lines like "the click of my heels" and "the swing in my waist," which paint vivid pictures of the speaker's graceful confidence and unapologetic celebration of her womanhood. These sensory details highlight her physical presence, which transcends social beauty standards.

Repetition is a key element throughout the poem, with the phrase "Phenomenal woman" being reiterated. This repetition not only strengthens the speaker's message of self-assurance but also contributes to the poem's rhythmic flow, reinforcing the emotional weight of her declaration. The poem also features alliteration, as seen in phrases like "the swing in my waist," which emphasises the speaker's elegance.

Enjambment is used to create a smooth, flowing rhythm, symbolising the uninterrupted nature of the speaker's confidence. Lastly, personification appears in the description of men "swarming around me," likening their admiration to the behavior of bees, which emphasises the power and attraction the speaker possesses.

Together, these figures of speech work to reinforce the poem's celebration of self-love, resilience, and the unyielding power of inner strength.

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Recap

- "Phenomenal Woman" is a poem by Maya Angelou celebrating self-love and inner strength
- The speaker rejects traditional beauty standards, stating she isn't "cute" or a fashion model
- She asserts that true beauty comes from self-assurance and unique qualities
- Her beauty is revealed in her presence, movements, and confident demeanor
- The speaker declares herself a "Phenomenal Woman," emphasising power from within
- In Stanza 2, the speaker describes the reaction of men when she enters a room, illustrating her powerful presence
- Her confidence and grace make men either stand in awe or fall to their knees
- The speaker compares the men's reaction to a "swarm of honeybees" drawn to her energy
- She attributes her captivating allure to her inner strength, not her physical appearance
- In Stanza 3, the speaker reflects on the mystery others see in her, which they fail to understand
- She explains that her charm lies in her posture, smile, and grace, not conventional beauty
- The speaker emphasises that her power is intangible and comes from within
- In Stanza 4, the speaker proudly embraces her identity without needing to shout or draw attention
- She asserts that her confidence is shown in subtle actions like the click of her heels and the bend of her hair
- The poem challenges society's superficial standards of beauty, urging women to embrace their inner strength and "phenomenal" qualities

Objective Questions

1. What is the main theme of "Phenomenal Woman"?
2. What is the speaker's attitude towards conventional beauty standards?
3. How does the speaker describe her appearance?

4. What does the speaker say define her beauty?
5. What metaphor is used to describe men's reaction to the speaker?
6. To what does the speaker attribute her captivating presence?
7. What does the speaker mean by "the arch of my back"?
8. How does the speaker express her self-assurance?
9. What does the phrase "Phenomenal woman" represent?
10. What does the speaker say make others proud of her?
11. What literary device is used in "a hive of honey bees"?
12. What does the "click of my heels" symbolise?
13. How do men react when the speaker enters the room?
14. What does "the joy in my feet" symbolise?
15. What is the overall tone of the poem?

Answers

1. Self-worth and empowerment
2. She rejects them
3. Not cute or built like a fashion model
4. Confidence and unique qualities
5. A hive of honey bees
6. The fire in her eyes
7. Her confidence and grace
8. Through graceful movements, not loud actions
9. The speaker's unique strength
10. Her confidence and self-assurance
11. Metaphor
12. Grace and confidence
13. They stand or fall to their knees
14. Inner happiness and confidence
15. Confident and empowering

Assignments

1. How does Maya Angelou challenge traditional beauty standards in her poem "Phenomenal Woman"?
2. In "Phenomenal Woman", the speaker describes several physical attributes

that contribute to her sense of empowerment. Discuss how these attributes reflect her inner strength and confidence, rather than conforming to conventional standards of beauty.

3. How does Angelou use metaphor and imagery to convey the speaker's powerful presence in a room?
4. The speaker of "Phenomenal Woman" repeatedly declares herself a "phenomenal woman." How does this declaration reflect the poem's themes of self-love, pride, and empowerment?
5. Compare and contrast the speaker's quiet confidence with the traditional expectations of femininity and beauty.

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BLOCK - 04

Short Fiction

SGOU

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Unit 1

The Yellow Wallpaper

-Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- gain the ability to identify and explain significant literary themes
- enhance their capacity to analyse literature critically
- develop an awareness of how historical and cultural contexts gain exposure to different schools of literary criticism, including feminist, psychological, and historical approaches, and use these frameworks to interpret texts

Prerequisites

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a gripping short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman that invites us to explore the complexities of mental illness, gender roles, and social expectations in the Victorian era. Through the eyes of an unnamed narrator, Gilman takes us on a psychological journey where confinement, both physical and emotional, becomes the heart of the struggle for freedom and self-expression.

Have you ever felt trapped whether by your environment, social pressures, or even your own mind? Imagine being isolated in a room, stripped of your autonomy, and forbidden to engage in the very activities that might bring you relief. That's the reality for the protagonist of this story, who is diagnosed with what was known in the 19th century as "nervous depression" and prescribed the infamous "rest cure." This treatment, which restricts her physical movement and creative expression, deepens her mental anguish, leading her to find solace in an unexpected place the yellow wallpaper in the room where she is confined.

As you read, think about the symbolism embedded in the wallpaper. What might the pattern represent? How do the narrator's observations of the wallpaper reflect her mental

state? And why does the story's portrayal of gender roles, marriage, and creativity resonate with us today?

By engaging with these questions, you'll not only explore the narrator's mental and emotional transformation but also uncover how "The Yellow Wallpaper" critiques the social norms that shaped women's lives during the late 19th century. Let's explore how this story encourages us to reflect on the importance of autonomy, the dangers of confinement, and the power of self-expression.

Keywords

Mental Illness, Confinement, Surveillance, Gender Roles, Patriarchy, Rest Cure, Creativity

4.1.1 Discussion

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a prominent advocate of the feminist movement in America. She critically examined the social conditions of women and challenged stereotypical notions surrounding marriage and motherhood. After marrying Charles Stetson and giving birth to her daughter, Katharine, she suffered a severe mental breakdown. Gilman underwent the "rest cure" prescribed by Dr S. Weir Mitchell, who advised her to "live as domestic a life as possible, have your child with you all the time [...] and never touch pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live" (Dubois). This regimen, rather than alleviating her condition, exacerbated her depression.

Gilman's recovery began during a stay in Bristol, after which she moved to California and started writing prolifically. During this time, she published her semi-autobiographical short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), in *The New England Magazine*. The story was widely praised for its sensitive and complex portrayal of a woman suffering from postpartum depression and her eventual descent into madness. Celebrated as a feminist masterpiece, it critiques the suffocating effects of patriarchy on women's mental health and autonomy.

Set in a colonial mansion during the late 19th century, "The Yellow Wallpaper" unfolds in the "nursery," a room with barred windows and peeling yellow wallpaper where the narrator is confined by her husband, John, under the guise of a "rest cure" for her supposed hysteria. Through a series of diary entries, the narrator chronicles her psychological decline, culminating in her identification with a creeping woman she believes is trapped behind the wallpaper. Blending Gothic horror with sharp social critique, the story explores themes of mental health, patriarchal oppression, and the consequences of forced domesticity, cementing its place as a cornerstone of feminist literature.

4.1.2 Summary of the Story

Sections 1-3

The narrator and her husband John rent a house for the summer in hopes of aiding her recovery from what John describes as "temporary nervous depression." The house, a colonial mansion, strikes the narrator as peculiar. She imagines it as an ancestral home or even a haunted house, especially given its suspiciously low rent and years of vacancy. When she shares these thoughts with John, he dismisses them with laughter. She remarks that this reaction is typical of his attitude in their marriage, hinting at her frustration with his insensitivity to her imagination and needs. A practical man of science, John disregards anything intangible or unquantifiable, including her feelings. His dismissive diagnosis of her condition as "slight hysterical tendencies" leaves her feeling powerless, especially as he is both her husband and physician. His opinion carries weight with relatives and neighbours, leaving her without support. Even her brother, also a reputable doctor, shares John's views, compounding her sense of helplessness. Under their instructions, she is prescribed rest, tonics, and a break from work despite her belief that engaging in meaningful activities might aid her recovery.

Secretly, she writes to find solace, but hiding her journal and fearing discovery adds to her exhaustion. She yearns for encouragement, convinced it would help her heal, but John instructs her not to dwell on her condition. To distract herself, she observes the house and appreciates its beauty, especially its garden and greenhouses. Yet, an unease about the house lingers, a suspicion John dismisses outright. Her suppressed resentment toward him grows, but she stifles her emotions, further depleting her energy.

The narrator wishes to stay in a sunny downstairs room with a view of the piazza, but John insists on the upstairs nursery, arguing it is more practical for their large bed. Though she often asserts that John is loving and caring, her tone betrays doubt, as his controlling decisions consistently override her desires. The nursery, likely repurposed as a gymnasium, repels her. She finds the yellow wallpaper particularly disturbing, describing its chaotic patterns and nauseating shades ranging from lurid orange to sulfuric yellow as an assault on artistic sensibilities. When John approaches, she hides her writing, fearing his disapproval.

Overwhelmed by fatigue and depression, the narrator stops writing for two weeks. She attributes her despair to her "nervous trouble," but John dismisses her feelings and insists she rest. His condescending attitude oscillates between neglect and paternalism, leaving her feeling guilty for being, in her view, a burden. She is relieved that Mary takes care of their baby, as her nervous state makes her unable to be around him. When she complains about the wallpaper, John dismisses her concerns and refuses to change it. His refusal deepens her anger and frustration, but she suppresses both, further exhausting herself.

The narrator tries to appreciate the room but remains fixated on the wallpaper. Its chaotic patterns and unsettling colours consume her thoughts. She begins imagining movement within the designs, seeing creeping shapes and staring eyes. These observations both unnerve and intrigue her. She recalls childhood fears of blank walls and plain furniture, contrasting them with the comfort she once found in a cherished chair. Now, however, it is the wallpaper alone that disturbs her. As her obsession deepens, she perceives a figure trapped behind the pattern a vague, formless shape.

John's sister, Jennie, a model homemaker, ar-

rives to assist with household duties. Her presence heightens the narrator's anxiety, as she feels compelled to hide her writing to avoid criticism. Brief visits from John's mother and extended family disrupt their isolation, but the narrator finds these interactions exhausting. Jennie takes charge of the household, granting the narrator more solitude, which only amplifies her feelings of loneliness. John, noticing her worsening condition, threatens to send her to Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, an advocate of the "rest cure." The narrator dreads this prospect, fearing the stricter treatment and the distance from her current surroundings.

As her condition deteriorates, she begins crying in secret and withdrawing further into herself. With John often away and Jennie leaving her alone when requested, the narrator spends more time in the nursery. Despite her initial aversion, she develops a peculiar attachment to the room, attributing it to the wallpaper. Her descriptions of it grow increasingly vivid and strange. She envisions the patterns as alive, crawling and pulsating with movement. The once-indistinct figure behind the pattern now takes on a clearer form a trapped woman struggling to escape.

Her fixation on the wallpaper becomes all-consuming. She spends hours scrutinising its intricate designs, convinced there is a central point where the pattern nearly makes sense. This obsessive observation both fascinates and exhausts her, yet she cannot pull herself away. What was once merely an irritation now dominates her thoughts, turning the room into both a prison and a sanctuary. Isolated with her growing fears and fragmented thoughts, the narrator spirals deeper into madness, her grip on reality unravelling as her identification with the figure in the wallpaper intensifies.

Sections 4-6

The narrator feels compelled to write about the wallpaper, even though it makes her tired, and she does not truly want to. She admits feeling relieved when she writes about it, but the effort gradually exhausts her, leading her to spend most of her time lying down. John continues to ignore her need for companionship, adopting a condescending and insensitive attitude. He often tells her she must make an effort to get better, which frustrates her, although she tries to justify his behaviour. She finds solace in knowing that the baby does not have to stay in the horrid room. Additionally, she admits it is easier for her to remain in the room than to take care of the baby. She does not share her growing obsession with the wallpaper with anyone.

The narrator imagines seeing things in the wallpaper that no one else can perceive, and the figure within it becomes clearer to her over time. The shape remains consistent but appears to multiply. Gradually, the figure resembles "a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern." She wishes her husband would take her away from the room.

One night, the narrator feels the figure shake the pattern as if trying to escape the wallpaper. She asks her husband if they can leave the house, but he refuses. Unable to sleep, she lies awake, observing the patterns on the wallpaper, which torment her. She notes that the wallpaper changes with the light; at night, the outer pattern transforms into bars, making the figure of the woman seem trapped behind them. During the daytime, the figure appears subdued, perhaps due to the pattern. John insists that the narrator sleep each day, and she pretends to do so. She grows afraid of John and observes strange expressions on both his and Jennie's faces, attributing them to their in-

teractions with the wallpaper.

One day, the narrator catches Jennie touching the wallpaper. Jennie explains that it stains everything, leaving yellow patches on their clothes. However, the narrator believes Jennie is secretly observing the pattern and becomes determined to keep its mystery to herself.

Her quest to uncover what lies behind the wallpaper keeps the narrator engaged and energised. Her health seems to improve, which pleases John. With only one week left in the house, she resolves to unravel the wallpaper's mystery before they leave.

Sections 7-10

The narrator feels better and stays awake at night, observing the wallpaper. She feels tired and confused during the day and sleeps a lot. She observes even minor changes in the wallpaper, such as the spreading of fungus over it, its changing colour, and the smell that pervades the house and even gets into her hair. Initially, she cannot bear the smell and wishes to burn down the house. Gradually, she gets used to it and feels that, like the colour of the paper, it is a "yellow smell" (13). She notices a long, straight streak at the bottom of the wall, running all around the room, behind all pieces of furniture except the bed. It looks as if it has been repeatedly rubbed over. She wonders who might have done it, why, and how. She feels dizzy observing the streak going around the room.

One day, the narrator claims to have discovered that the front pattern of the wallpaper moves and that it is the woman behind it who shakes it. Sometimes, she believes there are many women, and other times, only one behind the pattern. The woman seems to crawl around, shaking the pattern in an attempt to climb out, but the pattern seems to strangle her with its head, preventing anyone from escaping. The narrator says that whenever the women try to climb out, the pattern strangles them, turns them upside down, and their eyes turn white. She wishes the heads were hidden or removed.

The narrator believes the woman escapes from the wallpaper during the day and confides that she has seen her creeping around the lane, arbours, and road, hiding when someone passes by. The narrator feels for the woman, imagining her humiliation if caught creeping by daylight. Then, she abruptly reveals that she locks the door when she herself creeps by daylight, an act she describes as hysteric. She avoids doing it at night for fear of John catching her. She wishes John would take another room since he behaves strangely, and she does not want anyone else to free the woman at night. Her frantic attempts to locate the woman continue, and she notes that the woman is very fast.

With only two days left before leaving the house, the narrator decides to try removing the top pattern of the wallpaper from the bottom one. She has discovered something else but does not reveal it, as she trusts no one. John seems to have noticed something strange in her behavior and constantly discusses it with Jennie, who gives positive reports. The narrator feels he is pretending to be loving and kind, though she justifies him. She also believes both John and Jennie are affected by the wallpaper.On the last day, John spends the night in town. The narrator refuses to let Jennie sleep in the same room, saying she needs rest. At night, she sees the woman in the wallpaper trying to escape and tries to help by tearing off the paper. By morning, a huge pile of wallpaper is on the floor. Jennie is surprised to see the wall, and the narrator claims she tore it off out of spite for the paper. An unsuspecting Jennie remarks that she would have loved to do it herself. The narrator suspects Jennie

might have tried to touch the wallpaper and tells the readers that no one but her will touch it alive.

That night, the furniture was moved downstairs, and the room was bare except for the nailed-down bedstead. The narrator tells Jennie she wants to sleep in the room alone and not to call her even for dinner. Once everyone leaves, she locks the door and throws the key down onto the front path, determined not to go out or let anyone in until John returns. She plans to free the woman from the wallpaper and surprise John. She even has a rope to tie the woman if she tries to escape.

The narrator attempts to move the bed to stand on it, but when it does not budge, she angrily bites a piece off one corner. Then she tears down all the wallpaper she can reach. The paper seems to resist, and she feels the pattern, with its heads, eyes, and fungus, shrieks with contempt. Growing increasingly hysterical, she wishes to jump out of the window but refrains because the bars are too strong, and she considers it inappropriate. She avoids looking out of the windows, feeling there are many women creeping outside. She wonders if they all came out of the wallpaper like her.Now securely tied with a rope, she resolves to return behind the pattern at night. Creeping outside does not appeal to her, as she dislikes the green ground compared to the yellow room. Inside, she enjoys creeping smoothly along the floor, her shoulder fitting perfectly into the streak running around the room, ensuring she does not lose her way.

By now, John is pounding on the door, calling out to her. Unable to open it, he cries for an axe. The narrator calmly tells him the key is on the front path. Ignoring his repeated pleas to open the door, she continues creeping. Finally, John finds the key and enters the room. To his shock, he sees her sneaking around. She tells him she has finally escaped the wallpaper, despite his and Jennie's attempts to confine her, and assures him he cannot trap her again, as she has torn off most of the wallpaper. The narrator is surprised when John faints, falling across her path. She notes that she has to creep over him every time she passes the spot where he lies.

4.1.3 Thematic Analysis

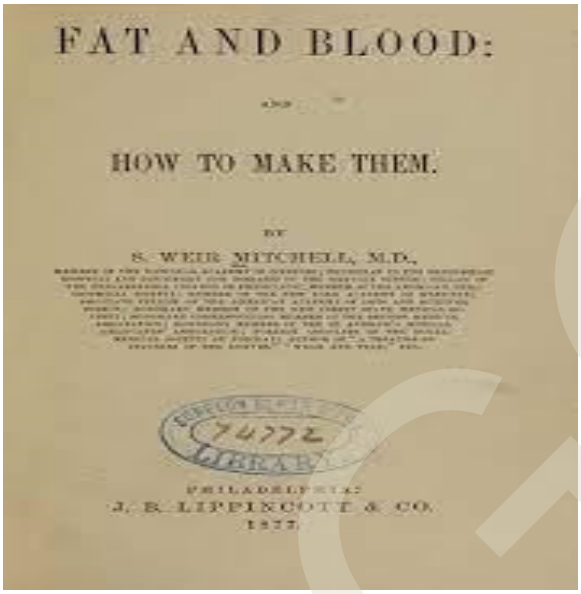
1. Mental Illness, Confinement and Surveillance

"The Yellow Wallpaper" explores mental illness and depression as its central themes. The unnamed narrator suffers from "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency," possibly neurasthenia (a nervous disorder) or postpartum depression, as suggested by repeated references to a baby and her aversion to being near him. She is prescribed the "rest cure," a treatment involving forced bed rest, isolation, and a controlled diet with minimal physical or mental activity. This method was developed by American physician S. Weir Mitchell.

To facilitate her recovery, the narrator and her husband, John, rent a mansion for the summer. However, she is confined to a room in the house and prohibited from engaging in physical or creative activities. Although she longs to write, her husband forbids it, believing it would harm her health. The narrator confides to the readers that writing has a cathartic effect and could help her feel better. Yet, she often refrains from writing, as she tires easily and must do it secretly to avoid reprimand. The narrator frequently expresses that some encouragement or companionship would improve her condition. However, John, being a physician, insists on the rest cure, which denies her both writing and social interaction. The story vividly portrays the damaging effects of the rest cure, with the narrator spiral-

ling further into depression due to her confinement.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author, had personal experience with the rest cure, having been a patient of S. Weir Mitchell herself. She was instructed to live a confined life and "never to touch pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live" (Dubois). Through the narrator's story, Gilman reflects on her own trauma and struggles.


FAT AND BLOOD:

OR

HOW TO MAKE THEM.

BY

S. WEIR MITCHELL, M.D.,

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

Fig. 4.1.1 Page from Weir Mitchell's *Fat and Blood* (1877)

The narrator is disturbed by the yellow wallpaper, and despite her request, John does not allow her to move to a better room downstairs. She obsessively watches the wallpaper, whose patterns and color she abhors. Gradually, she begins imagining that there are bars on the wallpaper and someone behind the pattern. She discerns the shape of a woman. Lying awake at night, she sees the woman trying to escape the wallpaper, shaking the bars and struggling to break free. The narrator considers the woman creeping around the house during the daytime. However, at night, the woman remains confined behind the wallpaper, shaking the bars in an attempt to escape. The narrator's own entrapment in the house, and even in her marriage, makes her identify with the woman behind the wallpaper. Just as the narrator is unable to escape a marriage that oppresses her, the woman is unable to escape the wallpaper.

"And she is trying to climb through all the time. But nobody could climb through that pattern – it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads. They get through, and the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down and makes their eyes white" (13)

The narrator's mental illness, combined with her empathy for the imagined woman, drives her to attempt to help the latter by tearing off the wallpaper. This act marks her utter descent into chaos and madness. The narrator 'becomes' the woman and begins creeping around the room. Her mental deterioration is complete, and the stay at the mansion, rather than curing her, leaves her as a mental wreck. Through the narrator, Gilman demonstrates how the 'rest cure' leads to the destruction of a woman, confined against her will and forced to suppress her creativity.

During this period of rest, the narrator is under constant surveillance, reduced to a pathological object to be observed and regulated. Any form of disability renders individuals objects of suspicion, kept under constant watch. In the narrator's case, her husband, Jennie, and other family members continuously supervise her, denying her any privacy. They prevent her from writing or expressing herself freely, forcing her to write in secret, which takes a severe toll on her mental health. Over time, she stops writing altogether, exhausted by the pressure of maintaining secrecy.

The fear of being observed prevents the narrator from asserting any agency, reducing her

to the status of a 'disciplined,' pathological object. Her body becomes a site of patriarchal and institutional control, with John and the family regulating her movements and activities in an effort to create a 'docile body' a 'healthy,' 'normative,' and 'productive' subject.

2. Gender Roles and Performativity

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" portrays characters who continuously perform gendered roles to conform to social norms. The narrator embodies the quintessential Victorian woman fragile and dainty while her husband, John, assumes the role of the stereotypical "macho" man, providing for the family and making decisions on her behalf. She feels compelled to "obey" John and cease writing, even though she recognises that writing and social interaction would aid her recovery. Playing the role of the "obedient" wife, she navigates the predominantly patriarchal social structure. Despite her anguish at being infantilised and emotionally neglected by John, she justifies his behaviour and attempts to convince the reader of his love for her, striving to align with the expectations of a "good" wife. Notably, she also feels guilty about her inability to care for the baby, repeatedly referencing him. These references suggest she may be suffering from postpartum depression. Whenever she mentions the baby, she attributes her inability to care for him to her "nerves," attempting to justify herself and avoid being seen as a "careless" mother.

John is acutely aware of the power he wields over his wife. As a physician, he exercises dual control over her—dictating her treatment, diet, and even the use of her physical and mental faculties. Conforming to social expectations, the narrator fulfills the role of the "emotional" wife, while John embodies the "rational" husband. Even the narrator's wishes regarding the room and the wallpaper are dismissed as "futile," "unhealthy," or "irrational" by her husband. His refusal to accommodate her desires also stems from the patriarchal notion that tender husbands risk being emasculated. Thus, he asserts his identity as a "man" by denying her requests. Additionally, he threatens to send her to Weir Mitchell if she does not recover soon. These actions underscore how the social order granted men significant power over their wives, who lacked agency or autonomy, even over their own bodies. Both the narrator and John grapple with the social expectations of gender roles imposed upon them, and this struggle is evident throughout the story.

3. Marriage and the Subjugation of Women

"The Yellow Wallpaper" portrays how marriage as an institution can be stifling and detrimental to women. The narrator is completely subordinate to her husband, and even in the most intimate sphere, she lacks agency over her own body. Her illness exacerbates her subjugation, as John, being both her husband and a physician, makes decisions for her. He believes he has the right to dictate where she should stay, what she should and should not do, and even how much company she should have. There is not a single instance in the story where he asks for her opinion, even regarding her own body. The narrator is forced to conform to his orders because she internalises her secondary status in the marriage. Her creativity is also suppressed by her husband, who possibly sees her writing as a threat to his own 'masculinity' since she possesses agency in the creative sphere. She is expected to confine herself to the domestic realm and never venture into the public domain, which has traditionally been the arena of men.

Hegel, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

(1910), examines the master-slave dialectic, also known as the lord-bondsman dialectic. He writes, "The truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the Bondsman" (qtd. in Ray and Seemin 5). The bondsman's acknowledgement of the master as superior is what defines the lord's identity as master. Conversely, the bondsman gains identity through the master, who exploits them. This master-slave dynamic is evident in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The narrator is entirely dependent on her husband, while John derives his authority and 'masculinity' from her submission and unquestioning obedience. He persistently infantilises her, disregarding her opinions and desires as unworthy of consideration. The narrator reflects: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (1), illustrating how she has internalised the belief that women are secondary subjects, undeserving of autonomy in marriage.

Although the narrator is visibly upset with her husband and dislikes his constant intrusions into her privacy, she never directly expresses her anger or frustration. Instead, she rationalises his behaviour to the reader, stating, "he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more" (3). This reveals the servility through which she navigates a predominantly patriarchal society. The primary cause of her descent into madness appears to be the continuous emotional turmoil within her marriage and the lack of support from her husband. Her awareness of her subordinate status, with no autonomy over herself, drives her to seek refuge in her imagination, identifying with the woman she envisions trapped behind the wallpaper. She sees this woman struggling to break free from the bars, mirroring her own longing to escape her stifling marriage and attain liberation.

4. The Domestic as the Site of Women's Trauma and the Struggle for Liberation

Women were traditionally excluded from the public domain, with their roles largely confined to those of wife and mother. In the story, while John goes to work, the narrator is restricted to the estate and not allowed to step outside. Her creativity is also suppressed as she is prohibited from writing, even though it could have provided her relief. Although the narrator repeats her husband's view that writing might tire her, this prohibition reflects a deliberate effort by the patriarchal social order to keep women out of male-dominated spaces. The narrator's need to write in secret or face criticism from her family further exhausts her. As part of the "rest cure," she is forced to remain idle at home an approach that conveniently serves to keep her under control and constant surveillance.

The narrator frequently mentions her inability to care for her child, attributing it to her nervous condition. She may be experiencing postpartum depression, and her perceived 'failure' as a mother fills her with guilt. However, she does not make any conscious effort to be near the child and openly admits, "I *cannot* be with him; it makes me so nervous" (4). This could be interpreted as her asserting agency as an autonomous woman, even though she frames it as a consequence of her nervous condition. She feels stifled by her family and appears relieved when they leave. The confinement to domestic life becomes overwhelmingly suffocating, leading her to make repeated attempts to escape, which ultimately results in her identification with the figure of the woman behind the wallpaper.

The narrator's final descent into complete mental imbalance represents her attempt to assert her agency. Her identification with the

woman she imagines behind the wallpaper symbolises her recognition of her entrapment within the institution of domesticity. Her efforts to free the imagined woman from behind bars reflect her desperate desire to escape the grip of a stifling marriage and domestic life. John's fear upon seeing her creeping across the room excites her, as she is, for the first time, able to intimidate her husband. By crawling over him each time she crosses the room, she asserts her sense of liberation and her urgent need for recognition and agency.

5. Creativity, Identity and Self-Expression

*"*The Yellow Wallpaper*"* explores the importance of self-expression and creativity to a woman's identity. The narrator, who loves writing, is forced to write in secret, fearing discovery by her husband or family. The entire story is framed as her secret writing, where her creativity finds expression. Denied opportunities to express herself by her husband and caretakers, writing becomes her sole means of catharsis. Ironically, the very creativity that could have aided her recovery is stifled by her family under the pretext of preserving her strength. Her husband's prohibition of her writing also stems from his fear of losing control and being 'emasculated' if his wife asserts her agency.

Caught in the conflict of conforming to the ideal of the 'good wife,' the narrator sacrifices her aspirations. Writing in secrecy while facing constant opposition exhausts her, leading to her withdrawal from the activity. Stifled and denied the only outlet for her thoughts and feelings, her mental health begins to deteriorate. Trapped in a suppressive marriage with no space for her desires or creativity, she seeks refuge in her imagination. Her obsession with the yellow wallpaper grows, and she envisions a woman trapped behind its bars, desperately trying to break free.

This repressed energy and creativity manifest in her pathological imagination, causing her to identify with the woman in the wallpaper. As her identity becomes entwined with the imagined figure, she spirals into madness. In the end, she symbolically 'becomes' the woman trying to escape. Creeping around the room and over her husband, she makes a final, unsettling attempt to assert her agency and desire for self-expression, transforming into what society might label a 'madwoman.'

4.1.4 Symbols

Gilman utilises symbolism extensively in the story. The most prominent symbol is the yellow wallpaper, from which the story derives its title. The "hideous" paper, with its "repellent, almost revolting" colour, a smouldering, unclean yellow strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight," irritates the narrator. She is disturbed by both the colour and the strange, confusing patterns. The wallpaper symbolises the narrator's own psyche, which seems confused and unstable. The curves of the patterns, which "suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions," reflect her disturbed thoughts and emotions. She perceives eyes staring at her from the wallpaper, indicating her dread of the constant surveillance she is subjected to. Her nervous condition and the resultant turbulence are captured through the image of the wallpaper.

The wallpaper also serves as a symbol of patriarchy, which strangles women and keeps them confined. The figure of the woman that the narrator sees within the wallpaper appears to be entrapped by bars, and she shakes them in an attempt to escape her confinement, much like the narrator herself who is trapped by patriarchy and domestic obligations. The woman

here symbolises women in general, caught in the tentacles of patriarchy and forced to abandon their creativity to fulfill domestic duties. The confined woman's desire for autonomy is symbolised by her attempts to escape from the wallpaper.

The house they stay in is described as "a colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, . . . a haunted house," foreshadowing the bizarre incidents that follow. The house, which is meant to be a place where the narrator can recover, becomes the site of her complete mental breakdown. The beautiful room that "opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings" (2) to which the narrator is denied access, symbolises the possibility of recovery. In contrast, the drab nursery with its barred windows and nailed-down bed symbolises her sense of entrapment. The baby, from whom she stays away, serves as a symbol of her perceived 'failure' as a mother and her distaste for domesticity. Considering that the baby was born immediately before they arrived at the house, she may suffer from postpartum depression. As such, the baby symbolises both the narrator's motherhood and her aversion to it. The symbols employed by the writer in "The Yellow Wallpaper" serve to set the tone and heighten the mood of the story.

4.1.5 Narrative Style

Gilman employs the first-person narrative style in *"*The Yellow Wallpaper*"*, with the narrator a woman suffering from depression-providing a present-tense account of her experiences in the house. The story is structured like a diary, with the narrator intimately sharing her observations and feelings. Her deepest fears and thoughts are revealed to the readers, as the style mimics what is typically used for diary entries. The occasional interruptions in the narration, caused by John or Jenny's presence, reinforce the sense that the story is written just as one would write a personal diary.

The events unfold through the narrator's perspective as she gradually descends into mental instability. However, the narration also invites readers to question whether what she describes is real or a product of her manic imagination. By the story's conclusion, when the narrator begins using the first-person pronoun "I" to refer to the figure in the wallpaper, we realise she has identified herself with the imagined woman, signalling her complete descent into madness. Gilman's narrative style effectively balances objective and subjective viewpoints, encouraging readers to interpret the story's deeper meaning.

Recap

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a prominent American feminist
- She challenged stereotypes around marriage and motherhood
- Severe depression followed her marriage and childbirth experience
- Underwent a "rest cure," worsening her mental health
- Recovery began after moving to California and writing
- Published "The Yellow Wallpaper," a feminist masterpiece

- Critiques patriarchy's effects on women's mental health
- Narrator confined, descends into madness through diary entries
- Wallpaper symbolises patriarchal oppression and mental deterioration
- Story blends Gothic horror with sharp social critique
- Mental illness explored through depression and confinement
- Surveillance restricts autonomy, stifling personal freedom
- Gender roles demand submission and suppress individuality
- Marriage portrayed as subjugation of women's autonomy
- Domestic space amplifies trauma and creative suppression
- Prohibited creativity worsens mental health and identity
- Symbols reflect entrapment, turmoil, and patriarchal control
- Imagination becomes a refuge, seeking liberation from constraints
- First-person narrative reveals descent into complete madness
- Breakdown symbolises rebellion, reclaiming agency and freedom

Objective Questions

1. In which magazine was "The Yellow Wallpaper" first published?
2. What mental condition does the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" suffer from?
3. What is the main theme of "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
4. What type of room is the narrator confined to in the story?
5. What does the narrator begin to see in the wallpaper's pattern?
6. What literary style does "The Yellow Wallpaper" blend with social critique?
7. Who is the narrator's primary caregiver in the story?
8. Which treatment is the narrator subjected to in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
9. What does the narrator ultimately identify herself with?
10. What happens to John at the end of the story?
11. What is the primary treatment prescribed to the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
12. What does the yellow wallpaper symbolise in the story?
13. Why does the narrator write in secret?
14. Who developed the "rest cure" treatment?
15. What is the relationship between the narrator and the figure she imagines in the wallpaper?

16. What narrative style does “The Yellow Wallpaper” employ?
17. What does the narrator’s creeping around the room at the end signify?
18. Why does the narrator avoid caring for her baby?
19. What does the barred window in the nursery symbolise?

Answers

1. The New England Magazine
2. Postpartum depression
3. Patriarchal oppression and its effects on women’s mental health
4. A nursery with barred windows and yellow wallpaper
5. A woman trapped behind the pattern
6. Gothic horror
7. John
8. Rest cure
9. The creeping woman in the wallpaper
10. He faints upon seeing the narrator creeping
11. The rest cure
12. Patriarchy and confinement
13. Her husband forbids her from writing
14. S. Weir Mitchell
15. The narrator identifies with the figure behind the wallpaper
16. First-person diary format
17. Her complete mental breakdown
18. She has a nervous condition and feels unable to care for the baby
19. Her entrapment and lack of agency

Assignments

1. Comment on the use of symbols in “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
2. Attempt a thematic analysis of the story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
3. How far does the narrative style contribute to the overall mood of the story “The Yellow Wallpaper”?

4. Locate the story "The Yellow Wallpaper" within the paradigms of feminism.
5. Analyse how mental instability is portrayed in "The Yellow Wallpaper".

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Unit 2

Boys and Girls

-Alice Munro

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- demonstrate familiarity with the coming-of-age genre
- identify the themes, symbols and narrative style used in the text
- locate the text within the framework of feminism
- contextualise the power politics inherent in familial relationships
- examine the text within the paradigms of ecocriticism and anthropocentrism

Prerequisites

In this unit, we will examine Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls," focusing on its exploration of gender roles and family dynamics within a patriarchal society. The story centres on an unnamed girl whose ambitions are stifled by traditional expectations of femininity. As she navigates the constraints placed upon her, we see her growing awareness of the limitations imposed by her gender. Through symbols like the foxes and Flora, the horse, Munro critiques how gender roles shape identities, stifling individuality. We'll also discuss how the narrative reflects the conflict between social norms and personal desires, particularly for women.

Keywords

Gender roles, Patriarchy, Family dynamics, Rebellion, Identity, Coming of Age, Nature

4.2.1 Discussion

Canada has nurtured literature since the colonial period, with women's writing emerging as early as the 17th century. Pioneers like Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill chronicled settler experiences, paving the way for later icons such as Margaret Atwood, L.M. Montgomery, Emily Carr and Alice Munro who elevated Canadian literature globally.

Canadian women's writing explores themes of identity, feminism, diversity, ecology and diasporic experiences, often featuring female protagonists challenging patriarchal norms. Contemporary writers experiment with narratives, embracing global and digital spaces.

Alice Munro, a master of the short story, won the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature. Her works, often set in Ontario's Huron County, reflect her rural upbringing, as seen in "Boys and Girls." Notable collections include *Dance of the Happy Shades*, *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Runaway*, establishing her as a cornerstone of Canadian literature.

4.2.3 Summary

Paragraphs 1-11

The story begins with the narrator recounting that her father is a fox farmer. He raises silver foxes in pens, kills them when their fur is ready, and sells the pelts to companies like the Hudson's Bay Company or the Montreal Fur Traders, which provide complimentary calendars featuring patriotic images. In the weeks before Christmas, the father skins the foxes in the cellar with the help of Henry Bailey, a hired man. The narrator and her brother, Laird, often watch the process while Henry teases them playfully. Although their mother disapproves of the operation inside the house due to the pervasive smell, the narrator finds it comforting, describing it as "reassuringly seasonal." Henry, despite his respiratory issues, frequently entertains the children.

The children are comfortable in the cellar and outdoors but fear their room at night. The narrator imagines escaped prisoners hiding in the clutter, and they feel safe only with the light on. Once Laird falls asleep, the narrator weaves stories about herself as a brave, self-sacrificing heroine performing heroic deeds like shooting and riding.

In summer, the narrator fills the foxes' watering dishes twice daily. Laird assists with a smaller can, often spilling water while she uses her father's "real" can, though only three-quarters full. The surviving foxes are named by the father, narrator, or Laird, though they remain hostile and occasionally bite. The narrator takes pride in helping her father with weeding and maintaining the pens. While her father is reserved and speaks only about work, her mother shares stories and anecdotes. Shy around her father, the narrator never asks him questions. One day, he introduces her to a feed salesman as "my new hired hand," making her blush with pride, though the salesman remarks that he thought she was "only a girl."

Paragraphs 12- 20

The narrator closely observes the pen and works diligently on it. One day, she notices her parents talking in front of the barn. She finds it unusual to see her mother there, as her mother rarely leaves the house unless it's for work. Typically, her mother is preoccupied with making jams, jellies, and pickles and managing the kitchen. The narrator is occasionally assigned kitchen tasks, which she detests, finding them "endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing." She escapes as soon as her chores are done, preferring to work outside,

especially with her father.That day, she overhears her mother telling her father that he'll have real help when Laird grows older. The narrator doesn't hear her father's reply but is pleased he listens politely, seemingly eager to return to work. She secretly hopes her father also finds her mother's presence unnecessary.

The narrator ponders her mother's remark about Laird helping their father. Dismissing her brother as lazy and unhelpful, she then hears her mother suggest that Laird's involvement will free her up for household tasks. Her mother laments that the narrator runs off whenever her back is turned, adding regretfully that it doesn't feel like there's a girl in the family.

Sitting unnoticed in a corner of the barn, the narrator feels her mother is hostile towards her despite her love for her. She believes her mother plots to confine her to the house out of spite or to assert dominance, rejecting the possibility that her mother might be lonely or envious. Confident her father won't take her mother's opinions seriously, the narrator asserts that Laird is incapable of working as effectively as she does and claims her mother doesn't understand the reality of their lives.

The narrator describes life on the farm. The foxes are fed horsemeat, sourced from farmers with horses too old or injured to work. Her father and Henry would pay the farmer, shoot the horse, and bring the meat home. If there were already ample meat, they'd keep the horse alive until needed. After the war, tractors replaced horses, and discarded horses were sometimes used for transport during the winter.When the narrator is eleven, two horses, Mack and Flora, are in the stable. Mack is a workhorse, while Flora, a spirited mare, is used for driving carts. While Mack is gentle, Flora is wild, veering at cars and other horses. Her speed and untamed nature are admired, but she's dangerous and prone to kicking.

Paragraphs 21-35

That winter, the narrator notices much discussion around the issue her mother raised. She feels unsafe and begins to understand that the word "girl" carries expectations. A girl was something she was expected to become. One day, during a fight with Laird, she uses all her strength against him, but Henry suggests Laird will eventually be stronger. Yet, like Laird, she knows she is growing stronger, too, though no one acknowledges it.When their grandmother visits, she tries to "correct" the narrator, insisting on proper "girl" behaviour: "Girls don't slam doors," "Girls keep their knees together," and, when the narrator asks questions, saying, "That's not a girl's business." The narrator rebels, believing it will protect her.

In spring, they decide to shoot Mack. Henry gives Laird oats to feed Mack, whose damaged teeth make him eat slowly. Henry comments that a toothless horse is useless. When the narrator asks if Mack will be shot that day, Henry remains silent. She has never seen a horse shot but knows it happens near the barn, where she once saw a horse's remains. She doesn't want to witness it but reasons that seeing is better than not knowing.Their father arrives with a gun, telling the children to leave. Instead, the narrator takes Laird into the barn, where they hide and watch through cracks as their father shoots Mack.

Paragraphs 36-45

Mack falls, kicks his legs, and dies. The narrator tells Laird they will skin him and cut him into pieces. Though shaken by the sight, she pretends she has seen a horse shot before. She then suggests they check for kittens in the hay. This triggers a memory of a childhood incident when she urged Laird to climb the

top beam of the barn and alerted their parents out of boredom. Laird, too young to explain himself, was scolded. Whenever she sees the brown and white coat he wore that day, guilt lingers. Observing Laird's remote, focused expression after Mack's death unsettles her. Though he promises not to reveal the incident, she takes him to Jubilee to distract him.

Two weeks later, the narrator learns Flora is to be shot. Not wanting to watch, she recalls Mack's death. While not deeply disturbed, she feels ashamed and grows cautious about her father's work. One day, while gathering fallen branches with Laird, they hear Flora whinnying and their father and Henry shouting. They arrive to see Flora running wild in the yard, having broken free. The narrator admires Flora's untamed energy, likening her to a ranch horse from Western films, even though she is "just an old driver, an old sorrel mare." Her father and Henry corner Flora, but she quickly escapes, dashing into a nearby field.

Paragraphs 46-55

To prevent the horse from escaping through the gate, the father shouts at the narrator to shut it. She runs quickly, dragging the heavy gate halfway across, when Flora appears. Just in time, she manages to put the chain on. Laird also comes to help. Inexplicably, instead of securing the gate, the narrator opens it as wide as she can. Reflecting later, she says it was not a conscious decision—she simply acted on impulse. Flora escapes, and Laird repeatedly tells her to shut the gate. When the father and Henry arrive, they see the horse escaping but do not realise what the narrator has done. Without asking questions, they take the truck to chase Flora, taking Laird with them. The narrator shuts the gate after they leave.

She believes Laird will reveal the truth, leading her father to distrust her. She cannot explain why she opened the gate but feels the farm is no place for a wild horse like Flora. Practicality trumps humanity and empathy there, and she knows her action only created more work for her father. Still, she does not regret opening the gate, feeling it was the only thing she could do for Flora.Later, the narrator lies to her mother, claiming Flora kicked down the fence and ran away. Recently, she has been decorating her side of the room in a way that is expected of girls and marking it separate from Laird's. They no longer sing together at night. Once, when she sang, Laird mocked her, and she stopped singing altogether. She still tells herself imaginary stories at night, but their tone has changed. The adventures now shift to her being rescued by men, focusing on her appearance. By the time she pictures herself as feminine, the excitement of the stories fades.

The father, Henry, and Laird return after one o'clock with Flora reduced to pieces of meat. Laird boasts they shot and cut her into fifty pieces. The mother reprimands him, and the father tells him to wash off the blood. At dinner, Laird reveals that the narrator let Flora escape. She does not deny it and begins to cry. When her father asks why she did it, she remains silent, expecting punishment. Laird points out her tears, and the father dismisses her action, saying, "She's only a girl." The narrator does not protest and silently accepts his judgment, though it breaks her heart.

4.2.3 Thematic Analysis

Gender Roles and the Construction of Masculinity and Femininity

Gender roles and expectations within a patriarchal social order form the central themes in Boys and Girls," where characters are 'constructed' as either 'masculine' or 'feminine.' Although the narrator works hard on the farm and is enthusiastic about outdoor tasks, her efforts are dismissed. She is expected to assist

her mother with household chores, which she finds "endless, dreary, and peculiarly depressing," simply because she is a girl. The rigid compartmentalisation of gender roles reinforces social norms dictating what individuals should or should not do based on their gender.

The mother exemplifies these patriarchal values, expressing disappointment that her daughter is not feminine enough and longing for Laird to grow into a "real help" for the father. The narrator's contributions are trivialised as childish, while her status as a girl confines her to the domestic sphere. Her growing awareness of the implications of being labelled a 'girl' is evident in her reflections:

"The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing... It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also, it was a joke on me."

Judith Butler's concept of gender as a performance articulated in *Bodies That Matter* and *Gender Trouble* resonates with the narrator's experience. Her grandmother enforces normative femininity, correcting her behaviour and imposing social expectations. Over time, the narrator succumbs to these pressures, decorating her room in a 'girlish' way and adopting feminine tasks. Even her imagination changes; once filled with adventures where she was the saviour, her stories now centre on her being rescued, mirroring the social image of women as passive damsels in distress.

The narrator's act of freeing Flora parallels her own rebellion against restrictive gender roles. However, her father's dismissal "she's only a girl" crushes her, making her feel inferior and unworthy, even in his eyes. This moment marks her complete transformation into a passive woman who accepts her perceived inadequacy.

Gender expectations also shape the narrator's parents and Laird. The father assumes the role of the breadwinner, while the mother is confined to household duties. Laird, initially an innocent child, transitions into a 'masculine' subject. By the end, he boasts about killing Flora, flaunting the blood on his clothes as a badge of masculinity. His transformation is solidified as he asserts superiority over his sister, mocking her songs and taking pride in aligning with the father's role. Munro's story vividly portrays how gender roles construct 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities, stifling individuality and often destroying the subjects involved.

Family Dynamics

The story revolves around a rural Canadian family engaged in fox farming. The family appears 'typical,' conforming to social norms: a husband and wife living in harmony with their son and daughter. The narrative initially presents a 'romantic' image of the family, with the father working outdoors, the mother managing household duties, and the children enjoying carefree lives. However, beneath this facade lies the unequal power dynamics inherent in the familial structure.

The father, as the breadwinner, wields visible power and authority, serving as the family's decision-maker. The mother, in contrast, acts as his support system, managing domestic responsibilities. The narrator idolises her father, craving his approval and eagerly assisting with outdoor tasks. In contrast, her mother's role, confined to the domestic sphere, holds little appeal for her. When the mother suggests she help inside the house, the narrator perceives it as a plot to prevent her from assisting her father, feeling her mother is acting "out of perversity, and to try her power." This reflects traces of the Electra Complex, as the narrator reveres her father while viewing her

mother as a rival for his attention. However, her admiration turns to despair when her father dismisses her as "only a girl," leaving her shattered and without hope.

While the parents love both children, there is a clear preference for Laird, who is encouraged to help the father outdoors. The narrator, on the other hand, is expected to care for Laird and is reprimanded when he engages in risky behaviour, such as climbing the barn beam. Her contributions to outdoor work are consistently criticised, while Laird is celebrated for his heroism in killing Flora. As the father's chosen heir, Laird is groomed to follow in his footsteps, whereas the narrator, despite her efforts, is denied this opportunity.

The grandmother's presence shows generational ties in rural society but also reinforces patriarchal control. During her visit, she exerts authority over the narrator, dictating how she should sit, behave, and speak while rarely interfering with Laird's life. This intrusion into the narrator's physical and mental autonomy presents how the mother and grandmother act as agents of patriarchy. They enforce social expectations, ultimately transforming the narrator into a 'docile,' 'feminine' subject stripped of confidence and ambition. These dynamics reveal the exploitative practices embedded within the family structure.

Rebellion, (Non)Conformity and Identity

The narrator is disturbed by her family's concerted efforts to confine her to the household and mould her into a 'feminine' subject. She perceives her mother as plotting against her, insisting that she handle household tasks and avoid outdoor work. This constant coercion to conform to traditional gender roles fuels her rebellion against the social order. She frequently escapes the kitchen after completing her chores "before mother thought of what she wanted me to do next" and continues helping her father, much to her mother's displeasure. This perceived antagonism from her mother fosters an adversarial attitude in the narrator. As she grows older, the pressure to conform intensifies. She decorates her room with lace, and even her imagination becomes subdued, aligning with social expectations. Her identity gradually shapes itself around the behaviour expected of her.

The narrator's act of enabling Flora's escape symbolises her rebellion against the patriarchal social order that confines her to 'feminine' roles. She identifies with Flora's untamed spirit, likening the horse to "a horse in a Western movie, an unbroken ranch horse, though she was just an old driver, an old sorrel mare." Her empathy for Flora reflects her own frustration at being dismissed as 'only a girl.' By secretly keeping the gate open, she asserts her agency and defies her family's expectations.

However, her father's dismissive comment-She's only a girl" shatters her rebellion. This moment forces her to internalise the patriarchal narrative, turning her into a conforming, normative 'feminine' subject. She ultimately accepts her father's view, believing that her identity is indeed limited to being 'just' a girl.

Coming of Age and the Loss of Innocence

"Boys and Girls" is a coming-of-age story that follows the narrator and her brother, Laird, as they transition from childhood to adulthood, gaining maturity and a deeper understanding of the world. Staying true to the conventions of the genre, the story features children on the brink of adulthood, narrated retrospectively by the protagonist. The siblings grow up in close connection with nature, spending their time in the fields and barn, playing, teasing each other, attending town shows, and helping their father. Despite the narrator's significant contributions to the pen, there is a noticeable

preference for Laird. As she matures, she realises that, as a girl, she is expected to conform to social norms that do not apply to her brother.

The significant moment of their coming-of-age journey is the shooting of Mack, which signals the loss of childhood innocence. While the narrator is shaken and withdrawn, Laird remains unbothered, marking his initiation into the 'man's world' of violence and killing. The boy she once tricked into climbing the barn beam transforms into a 'man' who proudly flaunts the blood on his clothes after shooting Flora. Their growing maturity is further evident when they stop singing to ward off fear at night, with Laird dismissing her songs as "silly," reflecting his newfound sense of masculinity and disdain for childishness.

The narrator's transformation into a docile woman is gradual but profound. She abandons outdoor work, accepts being 'only a girl,' and adheres to social norms of femininity. Her imaginative stories once centred on her as the rescuer, shift to narratives where she becomes the one who was rescued, embodying the passive role traditionally assigned to women. She identifies with Flora, the trapped animal, and allows her to escape in a symbolic act of rebellion. However, Flora's inevitable death mirrors the futility of her resistance.

The narrator's true surrender to social expectations occurs when her father dismisses her actions as insignificant because she is only a girl. This moment marks her full acceptance of her prescribed role and her entry into submissive womanhood.

Anthropocentrism, Nature and Women

Anthropocentrism refers to the belief that human beings are the most significant entities in the world and that everything else including nature and objects exists solely for human benefit. This worldview positions humans as superior to animals and plants, enabling the exploitation of nature.

In the story, the family's livelihood depends on fox farming, where silver foxes are killed and skinned for their fur, which is sold to companies. The narrator, though a child, is not disturbed by the killing or pelting, as it is seen as a necessity for survival. Neither she nor the other characters question the morality of these acts. Animals are perceived to have value only when they serve human purposes. Even when the horses are killed, the characters view it as routine, reflecting a utilitarian attitude: "used to seeing the death of animals as a necessity by which we lived." The entitlement inherent in anthropocentrism is evident here, as the narrator and Laird passively witness Mack's killing without acknowledging the cruelty. Nature is assumed to exist solely for humanity's benefit.

However, the female characters display moments of empathy toward the animals. The narrator, despite largely adhering to an anthropocentric worldview, acknowledges the foxes' hostility toward humans and is disturbed by Mack's death. She identifies with Flora, recognising that both she and the horse are trapped, and attempts to save Flora by opening the gate. The mother, similarly, avoids watching the pelting and keeps away from the cellar. She even scolds Laird for boasting about the blood on his shirt. This empathy may stem from their identification with the subjugated animals, reflecting their own experiences of exploitation in a male-dominated world.Unlike the men, who kill and exploit animals, the mother nurtures life by growing plants. The ecofeminist undertone in the story emerges through the narrator's and her mother's compassion for animals and their inclination to promote rather than destroy.

4.2.4 Symbols

Symbols play a crucial role in "Boys and Girls," reinforcing its themes. The foxes, raised by the narrator's father for their fur, symbolise the narrator and women in general, as they "inhabited a world (my) father made for them." A woman's life, much like the foxes', is dictated by the patriarchal society, with the father as the central authority. Just as only the breeding foxes are given names, women's identities are acknowledged primarily through marriage and reproduction. The narrator's namelessness reflects her insignificance and lack of identity as an unmarried girl.

Flora, the wild sorrel mare, symbolises womanhood and mirrors the narrator. Her untamed nature, described as "like a horse in a Western movie," parallels the narrator's liveliness and enthusiasm for outdoor work. However, both Flora and the narrator are subdued by social expectations. Flora's death, where she is "cut up in fifty pieces," symbolises how spirited women are crushed by patriarchal constraints.

The narrator's act of opening the gate for Flora is a powerful symbol of her yearning for freedom and agency. Though she does not understand why she disobeyed her father, she says, "I held the gate open; that was the only thing I could do." Her identification with Flora and the realisation of her powerlessness drives her act of rebellion. Yet, knowing Flora will ultimately be caught and killed reflects the narrator's acknowledgement of her own thwarted ambitions under patriarchy.

The name Laird displays the gendered disparity. This means "the owner of a large estate" in Scotland, and it explores Laird's exalted status as the male heir despite his inefficiency. In contrast, the narrator remains nameless, symbolising her powerlessness. The gate, separating childhood from adulthood, represents the narrator's transition to maturity after Flora's escape, while Laird assumes his role as a 'man.'

Additional symbols include the truck and tractors, representing industrialisation; the fur companies, signifying capitalism and the Canadian fur trade; and the family, embodying patriarchal authority.

4.2.5 Narrative Style

The story employs a first-person narrative style, with the protagonist, an unnamed girl, offering a retrospective account of her childhood. This dual perspective allows readers to experience the events through the eyes of an 11-year-old while also gaining insight from the adult narrator reflecting on the past. Other characters are introduced through the child's perspective, requiring readers to interpret them based on her observations.

The use of language is particularly noteworthy. While the narrator and her family speak Canadian English, the farmhand, Henry, uses class-inflected English, characterised by colloquial expressions (e.g., *gonna*) and ungrammatical constructions (e.g., ". . . that their Laird's gonna show you"). Canadian pronunciation influences the text, which *has* often been written as *of*, as in the salesman's comment, "Could of fooled me," or Laird's accusation, "She could of shut the gate, and she didn't." By incorporating these linguistic variations, the author emphasises the diversity of English usage in the local context, shaped by class and social status.

The repetition of the phrase *only a girl* is the most striking aspect of language in the story. This phrase explores the story's central theme, reflecting the patriarchal social order's dismissive and condescending attitude toward women. It shows how such attitudes crush their spirit, reducing them to docile, subservient roles.

Recap

- Narrator recounts father's fox farming business operations
- Father skins foxes; children watch alongside farmhand Henry
- Narrator dislikes kitchen chores and prefers outdoor farm work
- Narrator overhears mother wanting Laird's help for father
- Gender roles enforce the narrator's confinement to household tasks
- Narrator admires Flora's wild spirit, contrasts with Mack
- Mack is shot; the narrator pretends indifference but feels guilt
- Flora escapes; the narrator impulsively opens the gate for freedom
- Laird reveals the truth; father dismisses the narrator as "only a girl."
- Narrator conforms to gender norms, losing adventurous spirit
- Gender roles shape characters' identities in a patriarchal society
- The narrator struggles against assigned 'feminine' domestic duties
- The mother enforces femininity, urging domesticity for the narrator
- Gender as a performance: the narrator conforms over time
- The narrator's rebellion is symbolised by freeing Flora the horse
- Laird embraces masculinity; the narrator is dismissed as "only a girl"
- Family dynamics show unequal gender-based power structures
- The narrator idolises her father and resents her mother's control
- Coming-of-age: The narrator loses innocence, accepts the feminine role
- Flora's death mirrors the narrator's crushed ambitions under patriarchy

Objective Questions

1. In which collection by Alice Munro is the story "Boys and Girls" included?
2. Who is the narrator of the story?
3. Who is Henry Bailey?
4. What does the name 'Laird' mean?
5. Why does the narrator open the gate for Flora?
6. Why does the father excuse her behaviour?
7. What is the central theme of "Boys and Girls"?
8. Which concept of Judith Butler resonates with the narrator's experience?
9. What is the narrator's brother's name?
10. Who is the primary authority figure in the narrator's family?
11. Which animal symbolises womanhood and the narrator's rebellion?

12. What word does the father use to dismiss the narrator's actions?
13. Which worldview positions humans as superior to nature?
14. What is the narrator's mother's primary role in the family?
15. What does Laird proudly boast about after shooting Flora?

Answers

1. Dance of the Happy Shades
2. An unnamed 11-year-old girl
3. The farmhand helping the narrator's father
4. The owner of a large estate
5. She identifies with the trapped horse, which yearns for freedom
6. Because she is 'only a girl'
7. Gender
8. Performance
9. Laird
10. Father
11. Flora
12. Girl
13. Anthropocentrism
14. Domestic
15. Blood

Assignments

1. Discuss how women function as agents of patriarchy in "Boys and Girls".
2. How does the use of symbolism contribute to understanding gender roles, masculinity and femininity as articulated in the story?
3. Locate "Boys and Girls" within the paradigms of ecocriticism.
4. Comment on the narrative style utilised in the story.
5. Examine "Boys and Girls" as a coming-of-age story.

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SGOU

BLOCK - 05

Novels

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Unit 1

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

-Jearette Winterson

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- analyse how the novel mirrors the structure of the Old Testament
- examine the critique of patriarchal systems like the church, family, and society
- explore the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship
- analyse the interplay between personal and public histories
- examine themes of exile, return, and reconciliation with the past

Prerequisites

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson is far more than a coming-of-age story – it's a bold challenge to tradition, identity, and conformity. Imagine growing up in a home where everything is black and white: faith over feelings, rules over freedom, and "normal" is the only option. Now, picture a young girl, Jeanette, who dares to question it all – her family, her church, and society's rigid expectations – because of something as powerful as love.

Written when Winterson was just 23, the novel draws heavily from her own life, yet it twists reality into fiction. This semiautobiographical story explores themes of sexuality, religion, and individuality as Jeanette navigates a strict evangelical upbringing in 1980s Northern England. Her crime? Falling in love with another girl. The church sees demons, and her mother sees disgrace, but Jeanette begins to see herself—clearly, for the first time.

What makes *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* truly fascinating is how Winterson plays

with storytelling itself. The narrative isn't linear; it spirals like memory, mixing fairy tales, biblical allegories, and humour with the harsh realities of rejection and self-discovery. Winterson asks us a question: Can we truly escape the stories others write for us? Can we create new ones of our own?

As we read, think about the oranges in the title. What do they symbolise? What other "fruits" – or possibilities – exist outside the rigid boxes society tries to impose? Get ready to explore a novel that's sharp, witty, and unapologetically defiant, as we follow Jeanette's journey toward freedom and authenticity.

Keywords

Gender norms, Heterosexual norms, Patriarchal structures, Bildungsroman,

Feminine writing, Subjective identity, Coming of Age, Gender, Lesbian writing

5.1.1 Summary of the Novel

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit opens with an introduction, followed by the eight chapters respectively named after the first eight books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. The frequent references to biblical stories and quotes in the novel imply that the Bible acts as the moral guideline for Jeanette and her community. The development of her story is told through the history of Israel in the Bible. The laws of the Bible dictate the laws of Jeanette's world, and the history of the Israeli people runs parallel to Jeanette's history. Winterson attempts to equate an individual's private history with the public history of a religious group. The first five chapters of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* set up the law of the religious community, the law Jeanette's mother and her church piously obey and force Jeanette to obey as well. In comparison, in the last three chapters, the novel culminates in conflict but moves towards a calm ending.

Jeanette lived, like most people, with her mother and father. She is an adopted child, and her childhood was full of rigorous daily prayer. She spent most of her time assisting her mother and the Evangelist church. Jeanette starts wondering at an early age what her future will hold. Her childhood is filled with fanciful interludes. This reflects Jeanette's servitude to her mother from an early age. Jeanette is denied school. Instead, she is taken to daily sermons at church. Pastor Pinch is a travelling evangelist who warns the congregation of the evils of demon possession and how they could be a tool of the Devil. She longs to go to school; her mother one day receives a letter from the government stating that if Jeanette is not sent to school, her mother will be sent to prison. She faces difficulties at school, as she cannot stop herself from spreading the gospel of evangelism, creating panic among her classmates. Her mother tells her that she has been "called to be apart" from her schoolmates and will be rewarded with her true calling as a missionary.

Jeanette's mother's intense devotion to the church leads to tense relations with the neighbours. Jeanette is made to stand on an orange box for hours in the rain, giving pamphlets for their church. She imagines the story of a prince who is so desperate to find the perfect wife that he beheads anyone who opposes his ideal that perfection can be achieved. Jeanette begins her thoughts on men and women and the relationships between them. She is terrified at the thought that all men are beasts in disguise, and she will finally one day marry a beast, too. Jeanette meets a beautiful young girl named Melanie. They develop an intimacy over the next weeks, and Jeanette repeatedly travels downtown. She invites Melanie to church. She is accepted into the fold, and the two begin spending time together, to the alarm of Jeanette's mother. She warns Jeanette about the consequences, but Jeanette and Melanie meet and, over the next few weeks, become so close that they are inseparable. Jeanette, even when in love, is worried about the "unnatural passion" they are engaged in. Melanie consoles her by stating that their love is pure. Jeanette tells the story of a happy festival banquet in a high-walled castle and angry rebels.

Jeanette, during her walk through town, reflects on revealing her relationship with Melanie to her mother, after her mother had found them sleeping together. She also broods on a visit from her past in which Jeanette's birth mother arrives at their house and attempts to reclaim her. The same night, Jeanette tells Melanie that she loves her, but Melanie doesnot respond. The next morning at church, the pastor and Jeanette's mother reveal the girls' relationship in front of the entire congregation and the girls are called in to confess. Melanie repents and is taken away to be prayed over, but Jeanette refuses. Miss Jewsbury invites the shattered Jeanette for a cup of tea and reveals that Jeanette's close friend, Elsie Norris, had told her about the girls' relationship. Miss Jewsbury, pretending to comfort Jeanette, gradually leads her to an intimate physical relationship.

The elders of the church and the pastor arrive at the parlour the next morning and pray for her for twelve long hours, but Jeanette still refuses to repent. On orders, Jeanette is locked in the parlour without food for three days. She has a hallucination in which an orange demon warns her that if she forsakes him, she will be destroyed by grief, if she accepts him and keeps him around, her life will be difficult in a different way. Jeanette is exhausted and hungry and decides to repent, but keeping her demon means choosing to remain true to herself without denying her desires. Jeanette, along with Miss Jewsbury, drives to Melanie's family's house to say farewell, where Jeanette and Melanie spend the night together. Jeanette returns home, has a fever, and is interpreted by her mother as sin, leaving Jeanette's body. Jeanette's mother burns all of the letters the girls had sent to each other. She realises that her relationship with her mother is forever damaged.

Jeanette recovers slowly as she joins her church on a revival mission and enters into a friendship with a girl named Kathy from the church. Jeanette and Kathy get closer to each other while assisting Jeanette's mother with the Nativity play during Christmas. She finds Melanie walking into the church. Melanie visits Jeanette the same night and attempts to rekindle their friendship, but Jeanette pushes her away. Melanie follows Jeanette, but Jeanette is overwhelmed by feelings of shame and longing. Katy understands the trauma that her friend is going through and invites Jeanette to spend the weekend together. Jeanette accepts, and they two spend a night of intimacy. The love affair unfolds, and the girls spend more

time together at church and Bible study. They are happy with the newly achieved spiritual dimension of their relationship. Melanie returns once again to announce her marriage to an army man. Her fiancé is introduced to the congregation, where he leans over Jeanette and whispers that he "forgives" both Jeanette and Melanie for their transgression.

Jeanette's mother is enraged as her daughter is again caught with Katy, as they prepare to spend a week together at their church's guest house in the town of Morecambe. Jeanette decides to renounce the church and her dream of becoming a missionary. She tells the story of Sir Perceval, the youngest Knight of the Round Table and King Arthur's favourite. As Perceval sets off from Camelot, King Arthur is devastated. Scholars point out that Jeanette's appropriation and adaptation of Arthurian legend indicate her determination and courage when she confronts the extraordinary quest for her true self and desires.

Jeanette's mother and the pastor announced that women would no longer be allowed to preach or teach the Bible. Her moral corruption is because of the "man's role" she tried to take on. Women, when they are restricted from preaching and teaching, will not be corrupted by homosexuality. The pastor calls on Jeanette and forces her to yet another episode of exorcism, but Jeanette refuses and announces her decision to leave the church. She should also leave the house for her disobedience. Jeanette, on the last morning at home, is happy about the calm morning as she had thought it to be a frantic Judgement Day.

Jeanette then tells the story of a young girl named Winnet who is lost travelling through a great wood. Jeanette is in town doing odd jobs and driving an ice cream van for a local funeral parlour. She learns that Elsie Norris, an elderly member of Jeanette's church and her only childhood friend, is dead. Jeanette is forbidden from attending the funeral as she is an outcast. At the funeral parlour, Jeanette's boss asks Jeanette to serve food for the mourners. She is hesitant but agrees finally. Jeanette is recognised at the end when her boss calls her out to serve ice cream. There is commotion and chaos at the parlour as her mother publicly disowns the daughter.

Jeanette leaves her hometown for the big city but is entangled with her past. She thinks of home and cannot deny where she came from, so she decides to go home for Christmas. She arrives home and finds that her mother has acquired an electric organ and radio, and the church's Morecambe guest house is beyond repair. Her mother treats her normally, which makes Jeanette wonder if her mother has forgotten why she left or if she ever really left at all. Jeanette stays with her parents through Christmas. She watches her mother sitting down at her broadcast radio, trying to connect with other Christians elsewhere in England. The novel ends by emphasising the significance of female loyalty for female development. Jeanette is forever attached to her mother, even at the very end of the novel. Jeanette charts out her own journey, and the mother's presence will continue to influence her. The mother-daughter relationship cannot be cut off completely and remains crucial to the articulation of the self for the daughter. She has finally accepted her sexual orientation and desires; Jeanette's mother eventually admits that oranges are not the only fruit. When Jeanette returns to her old home, her mother philosophically remarks that oranges are not the only fruit. The oranges represent the repressive heterosexual law Jeanette's mother and her church represent and want to impose on her.

The mother is finally beginning to accept the coexistence of different worldviews. *Oranges* end when Jeanette eventually accepts her true self, which includes her sexual identity and makes her mother, who is the power figure of the family, aware that heterosexuality is not the only sexuality in the world.

5.1.2 Analysis

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a semi-autobiographical novel that explores the themes of religious control, sexuality, gender roles, and personal identity. Set in a rigid Pentecostal community, the story of Jeanette's coming-of-age explores her struggles with religious dogma, her burgeoning sexuality, and the complexities of familial relationships. By drawing heavily on biblical allusions, allegory, and symbolism, Winterson critiques social and religious institutions while illustrating the journey of a young woman searching for her true self.

The structure of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is central to its thematic significance. The novel is divided into eight chapters, each named after a book from the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. This deliberate framing reflects Winterson's use of religious allegory, drawing parallels between Jeanette's personal story and the broader history of religious moralism.

In the opening chapter, "Genesis," Jeanette's origins are revealed: she is an adopted child raised in a strict Pentecostal household. Her mother, a devout and controlling figure, imposes a rigid worldview on Jeanette, isolating her from external influences and moulding her into the ideal missionary. This "creation" of Jeanette sets the stage for conflict, as her identity begins to diverge from her mother's expectations. As the novel progresses through the chapters of "Exodus" and "Leviticus," Jeanette's growing awareness of her desires clashes with the moral laws of her community, mirroring the Old Testament's focus on obedience and punishment. These early chapters establish religion as the guiding force in Jeanette's life, dictating her behaviour, thoughts, and relationships.

The later chapters – "Joshua," "Judges," and "Ruth" – mark Jeanette's rebellion and ultimate self-acceptance. The Israelites' battles and trials in these biblical books mirror Jeanette's internal struggle as she confronts social and familial oppression. For instance, "Joshua" symbolises Jeanette's crossing into the "promised land" of self-realisation, while "Judges" presents her ongoing conflicts with the church and her mother. The final chapter, "Ruth," offers a quieter resolution, focusing on loyalty, compassion, and the complex dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship.

Winterson's alignment of Jeanette's personal journey with biblical history critiques the oppressive nature of religious institutions while reclaiming scripture as a means of storytelling and self-expression. This structural choice elevates Jeanette's struggles to a universal level, suggesting that personal liberation is akin to a spiritual and moral awakening.

A central theme in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is the oppressive role of religion in shaping identity and enforcing conformity. Jeanette's mother uses the Bible to justify her rigid worldview, positioning the church as a powerful, all-encompassing force that demands obedience and punishes deviation. The church functions as a tool for social control, with Pastor Pinch's sermons about demon possession and the devil's influence instilling fear and reinforcing the narrow moral codes that govern Jeanette's life.

Jeanette's relationship with Melanie, her first love, becomes the focal point of her rebellion. Their relationship is depicted as pure, tender, and natural, yet it is condemned by the church as "unnatural passion." When their love is revealed, Melanie repents under pressure, but Jeanette resists. Her refusal to confess or repent marks a significant moment in her journey, as she chooses to stay true to herself despite the threat of exorcism and isolation. This act of defiance symbolises Jeanette's rejection of religious authority and her determination to define her own morality.

Winterson critiques the hypocrisy of religious institutions that preach love and acceptance but foster exclusion, shame, and judgment. The elders' attempts to "cure" Jeanette through prolonged prayer and confinement expose the damaging effects of religious dogma on individual identity. Jeanette's eventual departure from the church symbolises her liberation from these oppressive forces, though it comes at the cost of familial and communal ties.

Winterson's exploration of sexuality is integral to Jeanette's journey toward self-acceptance. Growing up in a heteronormative and deeply religious environment, Jeanette internalises fears about love and relationships. Her early anxieties, symbolised by the story of the prince who beheads anyone opposing his ideal of perfection, reflect social pressures to conform to rigid standards of gender and sexuality.

Jeanette's love for Melanie challenges these norms. Their relationship, although deeply affectionate, is met with hostility and condemnation. The church's treatment of Jeanette – calling her an "abomination" and forcing her into exorcism – presents the social and religious intolerance toward homosexuality. Winterson uses Jeanette's experiences to critique this intolerance, portraying her love as natural and her rebellion as an act of courage.

Subsequent relationships, particularly with Katy, signify Jeanette's growth and healing. Unlike Melanie, Katy understands Jeanette's trauma and offers emotional support, representing a healthier, more accepting relationship free from shame and secrecy. Jeanette's refusal to repent or suppress her desires displays her determination to embrace her true identity, regardless of social judgment.

Through Jeanette's journey, Winterson challenges the idea that heterosexuality is the only "natural" or "moral" form of love. The novel's title itself, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, becomes a powerful metaphor for the coexistence of different sexualities and worldviews. The oranges, representing Jeanette's mother's rigid beliefs, are ultimately rejected in favour of a more inclusive understanding of identity.

Winterson incorporates allegory, myth, and symbolic storytelling to enrich the novel's themes. These stories serve as both a means of escape and a method of understanding the world. One key allegory is the story of the prince who demands perfection, critiquing social ideals that suppress individuality and impose impossible standards. This allegory mirrors Jeanette's struggles with religious and family expectations.

Another significant allegorical figure is Winnet, a girl lost in the woods whose journey symbolises Jeanette's own path to self-discovery. Winnet's decision to leave her oppressive environment and forge her own path parallels Jeanette's courage in breaking free from her mother's control. Winterson's references to Arthurian legend, particularly Sir Perceval and King Arthur, elevate Jeanette's personal struggle to a heroic quest, presenting the significance of her battle against social and familial oppression.

The recurring symbolism of oranges represents Jeanette's mother's rigid worldview

and the church's moral codes. In the end, the mother's reluctant acknowledgement that "oranges are not the only fruit" symbolises a shift in perspective, signalling her begrudging acceptance of alternative viewpoints. This metaphor conveys the novel's central message about embracing diversity and rejecting conformity.

The relationship between Jeanette and her mother is at the heart of the novel, embodying the tension between control and autonomy. Jeanette's mother is portrayed as a domineering figure, whose religious zeal governs every aspect of Jeanette's life. Her attempts to "cure" Jeanette's homosexuality through exorcism and punishment reveal her inability to accept her daughter's identity.

Despite their conflicts, Jeanette remains emotionally tied to her mother. The mother's rejection leaves a lasting impact, shaping Jeanette's struggles with shame and longing. However, Jeanette's decision to leave the church and embrace her identity marks a break from her mother's control, symbolising both liberation and pain. This complex dynamic presents the difficulty of reconciling one's personal identity with familial love.

In the novel's conclusion, Jeanette returns home for Christmas, only to find her mother unchanged. The mother's comment that "oranges are not the only fruit" signifies a subtle shift in her perspective, though full reconciliation remains out of reach. This unresolved tension shows the lasting influence of maternal relationships on identity formation. It suggests that while Jeanette may never fully escape her mother's influence, she can redefine her relationship with the past.

Recap

- The novel uses biblical books to structure the narrative
- Jeanette is adopted, raised in strict Pentecostalism
- Her mother enforces rigid religious practices and obedience
- Jeanette's relationship with religion is defined by control
- The church's influence shapes Jeanette's thoughts and desires
- Jeanette meets Melanie, sparking a forbidden love affair
- Their relationship causes tension with Jeanette's mother and church
- The church condemns Jeanette's love as an "unnatural passion."
- Jeanette resists repentance, asserting her true self
- Jeanette faces isolation and exorcism attempts by the church
- Jeanette's sexual identity and desires conflict with dogma
- She rejects the church's control, embracing her authentic self
- Jeanette grows emotionally through relationships with Kathy
- The mother's subtle acceptance marks the novel's resolution
- The oranges symbolise repression, embracing diversity in conclusion

Objective Questions

1. Who is the protagonist of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?
2. Which religious text is referenced heavily throughout the novel?
3. What does Jeanette's mother want her to become?
4. In which community does Jeanette grow up?
5. Who is Jeanette's first love in the novel?
6. What is the symbolic meaning of oranges in the novel?
7. Which biblical book is not used as a chapter name in the novel?
8. What action does Jeanette's mother take when she finds out about Jeanette's relationship?
9. Who is Jeanette's best friend from her church?
10. What type of job does Jeanette take after leaving her hometown?
11. Which legendary figure is referenced in the novel to symbolise Jeanette's journey?
12. What happens to Melanie in the end?
13. What is the name of Jeanette's adopted mother?
14. Jeanette's refusal to repent represents her rejection of what?
15. What does Jeanette's mother admit at the end of the novel?

Answers

1. Jeanette
2. Bible
3. Missionary
4. Pentecostal
5. Melanie
6. Repression
7. Psalms
8. Locks
9. Kathy
10. Ice cream van driver
11. Sir Perceval
12. Marries

13. Not named
14. Religion
15. Oranges are not the only fruit

Assignments

1. Discuss how Winterson uses religion as both a source of control and a means of self-discovery for Jeanette.
2. Examine the novel's use of binary oppositions, particularly those between good and evil, male and female, natural and unnatural, and faith and doubt.
3. Discuss the structural choice Winterson makes in dividing the novel into chapters named after the books of the Old Testament.
4. Analyse the character of Jeanette's mother, considering her religious fervour, her control over Jeanette, and her motivations throughout the novel.
5. Explore Jeanette's mother's expectations and aspirations for her daughter, particularly regarding her religious life and future as a missionary.

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BLOCK - 06

Drama

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Unit 1

Lights Out

-Manjula Padmanabhan

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- get an outline of the history of Indian theatre and the playwrights of the late twentieth century
- discuss the concept of space in the context of gender, body and performance and give voice to the marginalised gendered bodies
- describe the theatrical space of performance plays a significant role in reconfiguring the spatial dynamics of power
- analyse the ongoing social discrimination, violence, spatial challenges and exclusion faced by the women in the urban Indian society of the post-1980s.
- know gender ethics and sensibility that runs throughout the play

Prerequisites

Before moving on to this unit, let's imagine this scenario: You're at home, safe and comfortable, when piercing screams shatter the evening silence. A woman is being assaulted nearby. What do you do? Call for help? Investigate? Or close your curtains, turn off the lights, and convince yourself it's none of your business?

This haunting question lies at the heart of Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out*. Based on a real incident, the play captures the chilling passivity of middle-class urbanites faced with relentless violence against a woman in their vicinity. The characters' reactions – ranging from denial to discomfort to outright indifference – become a mirror for society's collective failure to intervene in the face of injustice.

Padmanabhan's sharp critique echoes C.S. Lakshmi's insights in *Body Blows: Women, Violence, and Survival*. Lakshmi writes about the invisible scars of violence, describing it as "bloodless" but deeply entrenched, a legacy of control and silence imposed on wom-

en's bodies. From Draupadi's humiliation to Sita's trial by fire, history and mythology teem with examples of women suffering while society watches.

Lights Out transforms the stage into a battleground, not just for the characters but for the audience's conscience. It challenges us to confront our own complicity in maintaining a culture of silence.

As we discuss this play, let's reflect: When the lights go out, do we hide in the dark, or do we shine a spotlight on what needs to change? The answer might define more than just the characters – it might define us.

Keywords

Gender violence, Middle-class apathy, Patriarchy, Feminist theatre, Ethical indifference, Myth and modernity, Collective silence, Psychological scars

6.1.1 Discussion

Manjula Padmanabhan, a playwright, author, and illustrator, merges artistic worlds to create socially relevant narratives. Her works span theatre, children's literature, speculative fiction, and journalism, characterised by a blend of visual and narrative storytelling. Beginning with the comic strip *Suki*, she humorously explored existential questions, while her children's books, like *Same & Different* and *Astro-Nuts*, reveal her narrative diversity. Her speculative fiction novels, *Escape* and *The Island of Lost Girls*, critique technological overreach and social disintegration. Padmanabhan's debut play, *Lights Out*, reflects urban apathy toward violence, drawing from real events to criticise the educated middle class's indifference to gender-based atrocities. Her award-winning play *Harvest* explores organ trade, poverty, and dehumanisation, solidifying her international acclaim.

Indian English drama evolved from myth-inspired works by early dramatists like Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose to contemporary socio-political criticisms by Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. The feminist wave in Indian theatre brought voices like Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, and Padmanabhan to the forefront. Their plays dismantled patriarchal structures and illuminated women's lived experiences, using the stage as a space for resistance and transformation. Padmanabhan's plays, such as *Hidden Fires* and *Harvest*, challenge audiences to confront their complicity in social issues, blending dystopian and realist themes. Her protagonists often embody resistance, becoming archetypes for social change.

Fig 6.1.1 Manjula Padmanabhan

Through vivid stagecraft and ethical exploration, Padmanabhan and her contemporaries transform Indian drama into a vibrant medium for reflecting and reshaping societal narratives, advocating for gender equity and human rights.

6.1.1 Summary of the Drama

Scene 1

Leela and Bhaskar, a middle-class couple, live on the sixth floor of an apartment in Santacruz, Mumbai. Night after night, they hear the cries of a woman from a nearby under-construction building. The sounds, which suggest an ongoing gang rape, deeply disturb Leela, who becomes increasingly fearful and distressed. She tries to shut out the sounds by closing doors, windows, and curtains and even using cotton in her ears, but her anxiety persists. Leela pleads with Bhaskar to contact the police and report the crime, but he remains indifferent and dismisses her concerns, unwilling to get involved. While Leela is emotionally torn and unable to ignore the brutality happening nearby, Bhaskar remains passive and cold, prioritizing their dinner plans with a guest over addressing the crime.

Scene 2

Mohan, Bhaskar's friend and dinner guest, arrives, and the conversation shifts to the disturbing incident. Rather than taking any action, Mohan exhibits curiosity about the crime, treating it as a spectacle rather than a crisis. Together, Mohan and Bhaskar discuss the perpetrators' audacity and even speculate whether the event could be part of a religious ritual to rationalise their inaction. Their behaviour reflects a troubling indifference and a detached attitude, where the suffering of the victim becomes a topic for discussion rather than a call to action. This insensitivity reveals a broader social apathy, as those near the crime choose to observe and debate rather than intervene.

Scene 3

The horrifying cries of the woman continue, echoing with pleas for help. While Leela is overcome with tension and guilt, Bhaskar and Mohan remain unbothered. Naina, Leela's friend and neighbour, arrives and expresses her concern, insisting that something must be done to help the victim. However, her husband Surinder soon joins, and his reaction is marked by empty bravado. He speaks aggressively about taking revenge on the assailants but shows no real empathy for the victim or willingness to take meaningful action.

Ultimately, none of the characters – men or women – step forward to assist the woman. The women, though distressed and desperate to help, are overpowered by the patriarchal dominance of their husbands, presenting their lack of agency within their marriages. The play ends on a chilling note as the woman's screams fade, and the rapists flee. This lack of intervention shows the pervasive social and moral failure to address violence against women, leaving the audience with an unsettling sense of inaction and complicity.

6.1.2 Analysis

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* is a thought-provoking play that examines gender dynamics, social indifference, and the pervasive apathy toward violence against women. Drawing from a real-life incident, the play presents a critique of patriarchal norms and urban inertia, exploring the moral and ethical paralysis that enables atrocities to persist unchecked. Through its characters, themes, and dramatic structure, *Lights Out* becomes a powerful narrative that calls for introspection and action.

Manjula Padmanabhan's work criticises the

entrenched patriarchal systems that perpetuate violence against women and silence their voices. As a self-proclaimed "genderist," Manjula Padmanabhan addresses issues such as gender discrimination, dehumanisation, and marginalisation of women. The play explores the complicity of both men and women in maintaining the status quo. While feminist in its critique, *Lights Out* also transcends this label to address broader social concerns about human rights and moral decay.

One of the central themes of the play is social apathy. The male characters in *Lights Out* epitomise the passive observers of violence, engaging in discussions and intellectualising the crime without taking action. This indifference reflects a broader urban dilemma, where individuals prioritise personal safety and comfort over collective responsibility. The play criticises this moral detachment, urging the audience to confront their complicity in perpetuating such apathy.

Padmanabhan's characters are neither extraordinary nor overtly heroic; rather, they embody the strengths and weaknesses of ordinary individuals. Through their interactions, the play exposes the complexities of gender roles and power dynamics in a patriarchal society.

Leela represents the traditional middle-class woman who prioritises the sanctity and safety of her home over social justice. Her repeated pleas to her husband, Bhaskar, to call the police reflect her sensitivity to the violence occurring nearby. However, her primary concern is not the victim's suffering but the intrusion of the crime into her peaceful domestic life. Leela's character criticises the educated elite's tendency to remain passive observers, more focused on self-preservation than moral action.

Naina, in contrast, is more vocal and compassionate. She identifies with the victim and argues strongly against the male characters' justifications of the crime. However, Naina's defiance is tempered by her awareness of her husband Surinder's aggressive nature, presenting the constraints placed on women even when they attempt to challenge patriarchal authority. Her character represents a more rational and independent perspective but also explores the limitations imposed by social and family expectations.

Frieda, another female character, employs silence as a form of resistance. Her quiet but impactful presence illustrates how internalised struggles against patriarchy manifest in different ways. Frieda's silence becomes a tool of resilience, emphasising her strength and resolve even within oppressive circumstances.

The male characters – Bhaskar, Mohan, and Surinder – are emblematic of patriarchal dominance and moral apathy. Bhaskar and Mohan's discussions about the crime reveal their insensitivity and escapism, while Surinder's violent rhetoric lacks genuine empathy for the victim. Together, they reflect a society conditioned to prioritise power dynamics over justice and humanity.

Padmanabhan's use of theatre as a medium for resistance and critique is central to the play's impact. By placing the crime off-stage, she forces the audience to grapple with their imagination and moral discomfort, mirroring the characters' passive observation. This spatial dynamic displays social detachment from violence, turning the theatre into a space for introspection and dialogue.

The unconventional plot structure and the deliberate absence of direct action within the play emphasise the systemic failures of justice and humanity. The characters' inaction serves as a critique of social inertia, compelling the audience to reflect on their potential complicity in similar real-world scenarios. The play's

theatrical space becomes a radical platform to question power dynamics, gender identities, and moral accountability.

Through *Lights Out*, Manjula Padmanabhan criticises the pervasive gender inequality and social apathy that underpin violence against women. The play raises serious questions about the psychology, culture, and male-dominated ideologies that perpetuate such crimes. The inaction of the male characters and the helplessness of the women reflect a psychological paralysis rooted in fear, social norms, and moral detachment.

Padmanabhan also criticises the role of women in sustaining patriarchal systems. As she observes, women must examine their contributions to gender-based discrimination as a step toward creating a more compassionate society. The play's female characters, despite their varying degrees of agency and resistance, are ultimately constrained by the social structures that silence and subjugate them.

Lights Out is a searing critique of the vulnerabilities of women and the indifference of modern society toward their suffering. Through its complex portrayal of characters and its innovative use of theatrical space, the play sheds light on the moral and ethical paralysis that allows violence to persist. Manjula Padmanabhan challenges the audience to confront these issues, urging a collective rethinking of social values and a renewed commitment to justice and humanity. By turning the stage into a space for resistance and dialogue, *Lights Out* becomes a powerful call for introspection, action, and systemic change.

Recap

- Leela and Bhaskar live in Santacruz, Mumbai, on the sixth floor
- Leela hears disturbing cries from a nearby under-construction building
- She believes the cries are related to a gang rape
- Leela becomes fearful and tries to block out the sounds
- Bhaskar dismisses her concerns, ignoring her requests to contact police
- Mohan, Bhaskar's friend, arrives for dinner, discussing the crime
- Mohan shows curiosity, treating the incident as a spectacle
- Bhaskar and Mohan rationalise the crime as part of a religious ritual
- Naina, Leela's friend, arrives and expresses concern for the victim
- Surinder, Naina's husband, speaks aggressively but shows no real action
- The women, despite distress, cannot act due to patriarchal control
- The play ends with no intervention as the rapists flee
- Padmanabhan critiques social indifference and male-dominated ideologies
- The characters embody the complexities of gender roles and social power dynamics
- The play challenges the audience to reflect on their own complicity

Objective Questions

1. What is the setting of the play *Lights Out*?
2. Who is Leela married to in the play?
3. Where do Leela and Bhaskar live?
4. What crime does Leela hear happening nearby?
5. What action does Leela take to block out the disturbing sounds?
6. How does Bhaskar react to Leela's concerns about the crime?
7. Who arrives at Leela and Bhaskar's house during dinner?
8. What is Mohan's attitude toward the crime he hears?
9. How does Naina react when she hears about the crime?
10. What is Surinder's proposed solution to the crime?
11. Who is portrayed as a passive observer in the play?
12. What is Leela's primary concern during the events of the play?
13. What is the role of Frieda in the play?
14. How does Padmanabhan use theatrical space in *Lights Out*?
15. What moral issue does the play primarily address?

Answers

1. Santacruz
2. Bhaskar
3. Sixth floor
4. Gang rape
5. Cotton in ears
6. Indifferent
7. Mohan
8. Curious
9. Concerned
10. Revenge
11. Bhaskar
12. Safety
13. Silence
14. Off-stage
15. Apathy

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of gender dynamics in Manjula Padmanabhan's play, *Lights Out*.
2. How does the play criticise urban apathy toward violence, particularly violence against women?
3. Examine the use of silence as a form of resistance in the play, especially through the character of Frieda.
4. Evaluate the psychological and social paralysis depicted in *Lights Out*.
5. How does Manjula Padmanabhan use the theatrical space in *Lights Out* to reflect the power dynamics between men and women, as well as the social detachment from the crime?

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BA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION- FIFTH SEMESTER
DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE DISCIPLINE CORE - **SET-01**
B21EG03DE - WOMEN'S WRITING (CBCS - PG)
2023-24 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

Section A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence. (10×1= 10)

1. Who is the enslaved poet mentioned in Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"?
2. In which language is the phrase "Ach, du" used in the poem, "Daddy"?
3. Which Brontë sister worked as a schoolmistress?
4. What animal is raised for fur in the narrator's family farm in Munro's "Boys and Girls"?
5. Who wrote the play *Lights Out*?
6. Which literary movement challenged the Church of England during the Victorian period as mentioned by Woolf in her essay?
7. What room is the narrator confined to in the story "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
8. Which device is used in the poem "Daddy" to represent the father's oppressive influence, as seen in the phrase "a bag full of God"?
9. What is Jeanette made to stand on while distributing church pamphlets in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?
10. What condition is the narrator suffering from in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
11. What word does Toomer use to describe Black women in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"?
12. What is the name of Padmanabhan's comic strip?

13. What is the name of Jeanette's close friend who visits her after a long time in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?

14. Which philosopher's work initiated new thinking on social norms during the Victorian period as mentioned by Woolf in her essay?

15. Which poet's observations does Walker incorporate in her essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"?

Section B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences. (5×2=10)

16. How does Padmanabhan address social apathy in her work?

17. What is the central theme of Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"?

18. What does the metaphor of "oranges" represent in the novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?

19. How does the narrator feel about her husband's attitude towards her condition in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

20. What marked the first half of the 19th century in England according to Virginia Woolf?

21. Why does the narrator open the gate for Flora to escape in Munro's "Boys and Girls"?

22. What does Walker argue about Black women's artistic expression during slavery in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"?

23. How does the speaker in "Phenomenal Woman" command attention in a room?

24. How does Padmanabhan depict the role of women in *Lights Out*?

25. How does Virginia Woolf critique Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*?

Section C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph. (6×5=30)

26. Discuss the role of confinement in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and its impact.

27. What role does spirituality play in the artistry of African-American women, according to Walker?

28. What is the significance of the repetition of the phrase "Phenomenal Woman" in the poem?

29. How does the narrator's father treat her compared to Laird, and what effect does this have on her in Munro's "Boys and Girls"?

30. What does the character Naina represent in *Lights Out*?

31. What impact did the rise of popular education have on Victorian literature according to Woolf?

32. How does the treatment prescribed by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell impact the narrator, and what does it reveal about 19th-century attitudes toward women's mental health in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

33. How does Walker contrast the lives of creative Black and white women?

34. What does *Lights Out* say about the moral responsibility of bystanders in cases of violence?

35. What is the significance of the foxes in the story, and how do they symbolize the narrator's experience in Munro's "Girls and Boys"?

36. What does the opening stanza of "Daddy" reveal about Sylvia Plath's emotional state and her relationship with her father?

37. How did the Brontë sisters use their works to critique Victorian society?

Section D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words. **(2×10 = 20)**

38. Analyse the role of empowerment in "Phenomenal Woman."

39. Explore how Alice Munro uses the rural farm setting to reflect the themes of gender roles and family dynamics in "Boys and Girls."

40. Discuss the social and cultural changes in England during the Victorian period and their impact on literature based on Virginia Woolf's essay.

41. Discuss the role of religious allegory in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and how it shapes Jeanette's journey.

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BA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION- FIFTH SEMESTER
DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE DISCIPLINE CORE - **Set-02**
B21EG03DE - WOMEN'S WRITING (CBCS - PG)
2023-24 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

Section A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence. (10×1= 10)

1. Which play by Manjula Padmanabhan critiques organ trade?
2. Which war-related term is used to describe the father's presence in the poem "Daddy"?
3. What art form does Walker associate with her mother's creative expression?
4. What was the narrator's daughter's name in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
5. Who is considered the greatest poet among the Brontë sisters?
6. Who won the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature?
7. Which white author does Walker compare to Phillis Wheatley?
8. How does the speaker in "Phenomenal Woman" view traditional standards of beauty?
9. What is the name of Jeanette's first love in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?
10. What major historical period coincided with the Victorian era as discussed by Woolf?
11. What genre is *Escape* by Manjula Padmanabhan?
12. Where does Walker suggest African American women found a creative outlet?
13. What type of work does Jeanette do when she leaves her hometown in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?

14. What room is the narrator confined to in the story "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

15. Which novel by Emily Brontë is known for its destructive love story?

Section B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences. (5×2=10)

16. What is the central message of Maya Angelou's poem "Phenomenal Woman"?

17. Why is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* considered more complex than *Jane Eyre*?

18. What is the primary theme of *Lights Out*?

19. How does Walker compare another writer with Phillis Wheatley in her essay?

20. What is the significance of the ending of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?

21. How does Plath critique patriarchal authority in "Daddy"?

22. What role does the yellow wallpaper play in the narrator's mental decline in the story "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

23. Why does Walker reference Phillis Wheatley in her essay?

24. What is the significance of the character Leela in *Lights Out*?

25. How did the Victorian era's moral rigidity influence literature?

Section C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph. (6×5=30)

26. What challenges did women face in Victorian society, and how did this influence literature according to Woolf?

27. Discuss how Jeanette's relationship with Melanie challenges the religious and social norms of her community in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

28. How does the family dynamic in the story "Boys and Girls" highlight issues of power and gender?

29. What inspired Manjula Padmanabhan to create *Lights Out*?

30. What role does the theme of isolation play in Jeanette's development as a character in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*?

31. What is the central theme of Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"?

32. How did the Industrial Revolution shape the Victorian period according to Woolf?

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33. Explain the significance of the narrator's relationship with her husband, John, in the context of gender roles during the 19th century as discussed in "The Yellow Wallpaper".

34. How does Maya Angelou use imagery in "Phenomenal Woman"?

35. What impact does Padmanabhan aim for in her portrayal of women's complicity in *Lights Out*?

36. How does Alice Walker use Jean Toomer's observations to support her argument?

37. Discuss the significance of the Holocaust imagery in Sylvia Path's "Daddy."

Section D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words. **(2×10 =20)**

38. Examine the role of the Brontë sisters in challenging Victorian gender norms and social expectations based on Woolf's essay.

39. Analyse the themes of power, identity, and psychological trauma in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy."

40. Analyse the significance of the mother-daughter relationship in the novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and how it evolves throughout the story.

41. Discuss the role of gender and its impact on the narrator's identity formation in "Boys and Girls." How do societal expectations shape her actions and self-perception?

SGOU

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കൂരിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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