МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ
Минский государственный лингвистический университет

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СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ РОМАН В ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНЫХ СТРАН

CONTEMPORARY NOVEL IN ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF TIME

Course Textbook

Допущено Министерством образования Республики Беларусь в качестве учебного пособия для студентов учреждений высшего образования по специальности «Современные иностранные языки (с указанием языков)»

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Учебное пособие предназначено для практических, семинарских и лекционных занятий по курсу «Современный роман в литературе англоязычных стран», а также для самостоятельной работы студентов, изучающих англоязычную литературу. Оно содержит историко-литературный обзор основных жанровых форм романа XXI века: постмодернистский, реалистический, мультикультурный, исторический, роман сознания, роман травмы, экороман и роман-кроссовер. Подразделы, нацеленные на детальное изучение наиболее репрезентативных романов разных жанровых форм, включают информацию об авторах, краткое содержание рассматриваемого произведения, методическую часть, а также иллюстративные отрывки для обсуждения.

Адресуется студентам филологических факультетов, преподавателям, а также всем, кто интересуется развитием современного англоязычного романа.

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Contents

Introduction

The first decades of the 21st century is a new stage in the world literary process. We already have some understanding of the peculiarities of this period, but at the same time, a more comprehensive study is needed to get a detailed view of the role and function of literature in the first two decades of this new century.

One of the principle features of this period that we must keep in mind is the speed of our life. All the civilizational processes are evolving 30 times faster than a century ago, so people today have to adapt themselves to new changes 30 times quicker. It means we are facing more pressure, more stress and the immense intensity of changes in our world. These changes also include literature and its ability to absorb and reflect back to us the new reality. We could say that the speed required of our awareness of life is the speed of an electronic signal.

Another important factor for the understanding of the subject matter of contemporary fiction is globalization. According to Anthony Giddens, globalization is "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" [qtd. from 38, p. 5]. Globalization is a most long-lasting phenomenon with profound effects. Thanks to the broad networks of mass media and social media, people have a chance and the right to know what may be of vital significance for their lives as well. There are no longer problems of purely local importance: what happens in the world can any moment happen in our neighbourhood.

Literature and arts at all times have been engaged in the search for meaning and for new human values under the current conditions, in the choices people make, in the flow of history with its wars, creations and destructions. What meanings and values has the Anglophone literature of the 21st century discovered so far? It is clear that novelists are at the vanguard of this course. This guidebook is aimed at giving the students and teachers dealing with contemporary literature in English some highlights about the general trends in novel writing, as well as, through a selection of most representative excerpts from contemporary novels, spotlighting most topical and relevant subjects, problems, literary innovations and debatable issues in the 21st-century Anglophone novel.

The key notion for understanding contemporary literature is probably "combinability" – in style, form and content. The borderline between the two centuries is only notional. Most of the contemporary novelists were born in the last age, and so they bring with them their topics and imagery, experiments and traditions into this millennium, and adjust them to what makes our life here, at this time and in these civilizational conditions. The names of such writers as Ian McEwan, David Mitchell, Hilary Mantel, Pat Barker, David Lodge,

Tony Morrison, J. M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood, Jonathan Safran Foer, Joyce Carol Oates and others were well known in the second half of the 20th century, and they are still renowned after the two decades of the new one. The talent of such authors continues to flourish, and we are happy to introduce their most recent work in this book. These and a number of new novelists (Donna Tartt, Sebastian Faulks, Helen Dunmore, Zadie Smith, Colson Whitehead, Jonathan Franzen and many others) were chosen for scholarly and academic discussion, because they have become the most widely taught in British, American and other universities in the English-speaking world. As modern researchers testify, these authors "have also become the most widely bought by public libraries worldwide, and have thereby become known to members of the reading public wanting to keep up with 'serious' fiction" [38, p. 1–2].

Another selection principle was based on mere chronology. Drawing on some background experience of the writers included into this guidebook, we present and focus on novels published no earlier than the year 2000, the milestone that inaugurated the 21st century (with the exception of one novel, *Disgrace*, by J. M. Coetzee, 1999).

Scholars who are going to work with this guidebook will certainly be curious about categories and classifications – a traditional approach in literary studies. The contemporary novel defies categorization; however, it looks like realistic traditions – old, classical, well-established – are favoured by a large number of authors. At the same time, postmodernism, which flourished in the last decades of the previous century, could not but reaffirm its stance, and so writers pay their tribute to it as well.

Besides, those trends that we saw in the 1990s have moved into the present day and shaped such genres as historical, political, multicultural and psychological novels, eco-novels and sexual minority works of fiction, the novel of consciousness (neuronovel) and young adult fiction (or the novel of maturity, the crossover novel). These genres present a brightly coloured panorama in fictional writing, thus testifying to the never-ending search for the sense of our human condition: what does it mean to be human today, in the world transformed by new technologies and virtual reality? The novels discussed in this guidebook aim to find answers to a whole range of questions a contemporary person asks: how is our life different materially, physically, psychologically and spiritually from that of our immediate predecessors? What have we learned, if anything, from history? What is aging like and how can we accommodate it into our consciousness? How has our psychological make-up changed? Why do we no longer have hysteria, but suffer overwhelmingly from depression? How can we make our world a better place? How can we re-establish the value of humanity, goodness, justice, empathy and compassion, truth and preservation of the natural surrounding?

These and other ontological questions are posed by contemporary writers and are partially answered. Students, teachers, scholars and a wide audience of readers are invited to take further the search for meaning through literature.

Working with this book

This guidebook is designed for different types of readers, scholars and learners. The **"Reference Section"** may be a handy tool for locating an English-speaking writer among the Booker, Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winners.

Section 1 "New contemporary novel in English: genres, styles, trends" consists of 9 subsections that offer information concerning the basic characteristics of literary trends / styles / genres of the 21st-century fiction, presents most notable writers and their novels, focusing predominantly on the fiction published after 2000. Each subsection is followed by a set of questions under the heading "**Work further**". There is also a "**Writing**" assignment, inviting you to put down on paper and share essays and reviews on topical, poignant, sensitive or fascinating issues, and a "**Test yourself**" unit.

Section 2 "Discussing the authors and texts" is associated with the tasks referenced in Section 1. It contains targeted material about the selected writers and their novels. One or several excerpts from the novels discussed are presented for close reading, comments and interpretation. This may be used in the classroom, for seminars and workshops, for further, more detailed study of the 21st-century Anglophone novelists and their books. Please note that there is no strict correspondence between chapters discussing the subgenres and those presenting individual novels: one novel may be discussed within several contexts and genre forms.

Section 3 "Resources" includes the books referred to or cited in the sections.

Note the following symbols used:

In-text symbols

- comment on this: an instruction to suspend reading in order to comment on a quotation, opinion or some fact.
- for a more profound discussion, see subsection [...]: reference to the subsection where the pointed novel is discussed further.
- find out what it means if you have forgotten: an instruction requiring recollection or consulting a resource.
- read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work Further" section; provide your comments: reference to a further task.
- please see section [...]: reference to the related information in other sections.

Novel discussion symbols

- information about the author
- information about the novel for discussion
- the novel discussion points
- excerpts from the novel
- a writing task
- a "test yourself" task
- instruction for a reading task

Reference Section

A. This sub-section offers the **list of English-language novels and writers who won the Booker Prize for Fiction** (a literary prize awarded each year for the best novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland) in the period between 2000 and 2021.

2000: *The Blind Assassin*, by Margaret Atwood (Canada)
2001: *True History of the Kelly Gang*, by Peter Carey (Australia)
2002: *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel (Canada)
2003: *Vernon God Little*, by D.B.C. Pierre (Australia)
2004: *The Line of Beauty*, by Alan Hollinghurst (GB)
2005: *The Sea*, by John Banville (Ireland)
2006: *The Inheritance of Loss*, by Kiran Desai (India)
2007: *The Gathering*, by Anne Enright (Ireland)
2008: *The White Tiger*, by Aravind Adiga (India)
2009: *Wolf Hall*, by Hilary Mantel (GB)
2010: *The Finkler Question*, by Howard Jacobson (GB)
2011: *The Sense of an Ending*, by Julian Barnes (GB)
2012: *Bring Up the Bodies*, by Hilary Mantel (GB)
2013: *The Luminaries*, by Eleanor Catton (New Zealand)
2014: *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, by Richard Flanagan (Australia)
2015: *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, by Marlon James (Jamaica)
2016: *The Sellout*, by Paul Beatty (USA)
2017: *Lincoln in the Bardo*, by George Saunders (USA)
2018: *Milkman*, by Anna Burns (GB)
2019: *The Testaments*, by Margaret Atwood (Canada)
Girl, Woman, Other, by Bernardine Evaristo (GB)
2020: *Shuggie Bain*, by Douglas Stuart (GB/USA)
2021: *The Promise*, by Damon Galgut (South Africa)

B. This sub-section offers the **list of English-language novels and writers who won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction** (a US literary prize that recognizes distinguished fiction by American authors, preferably dealing with American life) in the period between 2000 and 2021.

2000: Short stories were selected for the award
2001: *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, by Michael Chabon
2002: *Empire Falls*, by Richard Russo
2003: *Middlesex*, by Jeffrey Eugenides
2004: *The Known World*, by Edward P. Jones

2005: *Gilead*, by Marilynne Robinson
2006: *March*, by Geraldine Brooks
2007: *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy
2008: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Diaz
2009: Short stories were selected for the award
2010: *Tinkers*, by Paul Harding
2011: Short stories were selected for the award
2012: No award given
2013: *The Orphan Master's Son*, by Adam Johnson
2014: *The Goldfinch*, by Donna Tartt
2015: *All the Light We Cannot See*, by Anthony Doerr
2016: *The Sympathizer*, by Viet Thanh Nguyen
2017: *The Underground Railroad*, by Colson Whitehead
2018: *Less*, by Andrew Sean Greer
2019: *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers
2020: *The Nickel Boys*, by Colson Whitehead
2021: *The Night Watchman*, by Louise Erdrich

C. This sub-section offers the **list of English-language writers (novelists) who won the Nobel Prize in Literature** (a prize that is awarded annually, since 1901, to an author from any country who has, in the words of the will of Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel, "in the field of literature, produced the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction") in the period between 2000 and 2021.

2001: Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (Trinidad and Tobago / GB) "for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories".

2003: John M. Coetzee (South Africa / Australia) "who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider".

2007: Doris Lessing (GB / Zimbabwe) "that epicist of the female experience, who with scepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilisation to scrutiny".

2017: Kazuo Ishiguro (GB) "who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world".

2021: Abdulrazak Gurnah (born in Zanzibar and active in England) "for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents".

Section 1. New contemporary novel in English: genres, styles, trends

It is universally accepted that the novel in English originated in the 18th century with the writing of Daniel Defoe (1660–1731). It has gone a very long way through centuries, evolving in both form and content, changing, responding to the challenges of society and human development, absorbing whatever came its way, sometimes shocking the readers, sometimes serving them a moral lesson. Its main role, however, has remained uncontested: to inform without instructing, to teach without moralizing, and to inspire without provoking.

Novels have become central to culture, because they are the only artistic form that is able to accommodate all the scruples of life together with broad speculations about the human condition.

Over twenty years have passed since the turn of the millennium. It means that a new and rather clear-cut period in the literary process has formed, with its own canon, trends and topical issues. The following sub-sections offer a more detailed outlook on the novel from the year 2000 up to 2021 through a selected range of most illustrative fictional works.

1.1. The 21st century: contexts, challenges, prospects

The 21st century arrived not only as a new millennium, but also as a qualitatively new epoch, bringing with it a more advanced stage of new technologies in all spheres of life: IT, AI, cutting-edge DNA-related research, VR, AR, etc. Alongside with that, natural disasters and new psychological ailments and disturbances have come around, replacing what was known as melancholia with anxiety and depression, leading to increased numbers of suicides, terrorist attacks and other extremities. With life expectancy generally increasing, its side effects came up in the form of dementia – with general health contributing to a more active and enjoyable life style, but with the mind refusing to align itself with the longer life of the body.

A number of world events changed the way we normally treated human values. A new epoch is usually associated with some extraordinary event, a war or a revolution. For one literary fashion to be replaced by another, as the history of world literature shows, there has to be a trigger, a shock, an event of almost global dimensions, such as were the two world wars which delineated the modernist and the postmodern world, or the revolutions of the previous centuries. The 21st century came with a shock of 9/11, which was "a dose of reality exposing the illusions and complacency of western society" [5, p. 5]. The 21st century in all actuality was born with a terrorist attack on 11 September 2001. Nineteen hijackers seized four commercial passenger flights and directed them into Twin Towers of the World Trade

Centre in New York City. The devastating consequence was not only the substantial damage to the buildings: the unprecedented loss of lives of about 3,000 people shattered the sense of general security of the Western world. Slavoj Žižek pointed out that "it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality; as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the TV screen – and what happened on September 11 was that this fantastic screen apparition entered our reality" [41, p. 16] . This event saw the onset of terrorism in the new millennium.

In terms of historical chronology, this demarcation line also marks a retreat from postmodernism, a kind of sobering about the real Reality, not the playful fiction that eschews points of reference. Rather, the dumbfounding start of the 21st century awoke a sincere and conscious aesthetic response to things that had been dormant in the underlayers of the western world's collective consciousness, almost to the point of denial. Now the world had to come to terms with the real existence of terrorism not somewhere on the outposts of everyday existence, but close to everyone's home. This and other social realities have actually been shaping our communal experience. Thus, Martin Amis in his article published in the *Guardian* described the bombing attack on the World Trade Centre as the "apotheosis of the postmodern era" [1]. It is of note that many writers responded to the event with a number of poignantly topical novels. An almost instant aesthetic response to the terrorist attack manifested itself in Pat Barker's *Double Vision* (2003) and J.G. Ballard's *Millennium People* (2003). Besides these early responses, there were also novels like *Saturday* (2005) by Ian McEwan, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) by Jonathan Safran Foer, *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo, *The Stars in the Bright Sky* (2010) by Alan Warner, *Bleeding Edge* (2013) by Thomas Pynchon and many others.

As the century was moving on, a lot of changes in the social life of all nations of the globe took place. Same-sex marriage was legalized in a number of countries. International crimes committed by governments became a habitual thing: rigged elections, cyber-attacks, assassinations of political targets, the return of fascism, and masquerading dictatorships unveiled more sophisticated ways of manipulation and struggle for power and dominance on the political scene. COVID struck an unexpected and impartial blow to the rich and the poor, young and old, healthy and infirm alike. The world became different again: we had to learn new skills: Zooming and Microsoft-Teaming, distancing, masking, isolating and "lockdowning".

Examining the "Acknowledgement" pages of contemporary novels, we are faced with an amazing list of documents, scientific data, research materials that the authors have worked with. Thus, Pat Barker spent years in archives of the First World War to bring onto the surface some unnarrated and uncomfortable facts, apart from the actual WW I historical documents. She made an amazing discovery about facial surgery and the relations at the famous Slade School of Fine Art, and faced contemporary readers with the buried horrors of bodily suffering in her 2007 novel *Toby's Room*. Hilary Mantel, who dug up the secrets of the Tudor family and King

Henry VIII's rule in her trilogy (*Woolf Hall*, 2009; *Bring Up the Bodies*, 2012; *The Mirror and the Light*, 2020), confessed she saw her fictional (and flesh-and-blood) character Thomas Cromwell in her dreams every night, for such intense and profound was her engagement with research. Helen Dunmore, in order to expose the psychological truth of the trauma of Stalin's and Soviet dictatorship in the novels *The Siege* (2001) and *The Betrayal* (2010), referred to a whole range of books on the subject. David Lodge, in order to entertain the reader with the mystery of human consciousness, dug deep into neuroscience, thoroughly mastering the scientific works of Francis Crick, David Chalmers, Stuart Southerland, Noam Chomsky, Antonio Damasio, Daniel Dennet and others. What it may mean for us as readers is that the novel form is becoming more and more demanding: a writer nowadays is not just someone with a rich imagination and a story to tell. A writer is a researcher and an explorer, a professor and an artist, a provocateur and a social mediator.

Literary scholars of the 1990s – early 2000s noted the wide discussion of the "decline of the novel", which had begun in the 1970s–1980s with pronouncements like "the novel no longer possesses the essential 'novelty'". However, David Lodge was optimistic in this sense in 2002: "Literature, he wrote, is the record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have. … The novel arguably is man's most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time" [26, p. 29]  . However, in 2019, Joseph Bottum published the book *The Decline of the Novel*, where that optimism is no longer so beaming: "The sad truth is that the novel just isn't what it used to be. It doesn't occupy the same cultural high ground, and it doesn't typically feel to readers like much of a practical device for addressing serious problems" [8, p. 5]  . However, other, drastically opposite opinions are in place, too: "Today, equally, the novel as a form clearly dominates the publishing scene and, despite rival media attractions, remains popular" [6, p. 9].

Digital culture has ushered in an age when it is no longer possible to stay disconnected from others for a long time. The reality of social networks has in many ways replaced live communication. No matter what the physical distance is, we can easily connect with each other and even celebrities. Ours is the age of unimaginable technological advance. The Internet has entered into competition with the traditional book form. As one scholar notes, "The world of Internet fiction, or hyperfiction, proposes a fictional universe in which there is no liner narrative, and no single authorial voice: rather there is a potentially unlimited world of myriad possibilities whereby any 'author' can enter or leave a text at will, rejecting any conventional notion of causality. There can be no eventual outcome; all is provisional, revisable, open-ended" [6, p. 14]  . However, as the publishing business may demonstrate, the conventional book-form of the novel has managed to survive. In the "Work further" unit that follows this subsection, you will find a few quotations that reflect on this enigma.

In cultural-historical terms, 20 years of the new century that have passed is a whole epoch, which is defined by trends and fashions of its own, that has produced new machines and new values, new technologies and new anxieties. Contemporary writing is a controversial area: realist and fantastical, obsessed with the two world wars and the issue of self-identity, the aftermath of colonization and immigration, with apocalyptic and utopian visions of the world. The modern novel (2000–2021) inevitably engages with the new realities of life, those never before experienced in history: the ubiquitous intervention of IT and the Internet, mass media and social networks. It appears too difficult at the moment to define the main tendency in Anglophone literature that reflects the general direction of literary development. However, a number of critics have already come up with elaborated terms: "hypermodernism", "metamodernism", "post-postmodernism", "aftermodernism", "digimodernism", "speculative realism", "neorealism", "hyperrealism", etc.

It seems no one can predict anything about the nearest future, considering the environmental issues, gender and sex policies. We are in here now, and it is very much up to each of us to form and shape our present and our future reality.

Work further

➢ Think about and comment on these quotations about fiction in the 21st century.

a) "I do not believe that novels are trivial matters. The ones I care most about are those which attempt radical reformulations of language, form and ideas, those that attempt to do what the word novel seems to insist upon: to see the world anew" [33, p. 393].

b) "…the whole point of fiction … is to get away from yourself into experiences of other people, into different worlds, into different lives. …It's all about imagining what it's like to be somebody else. And that is, after all, one of the most important tasks of life. One of the things the novel can do, is to stimulate that process" [17, p. 53].

c) "An inexpensive book from a reputable publisher is a small, rectangular, boxlike object a few inches long, a few inches wide, and an inch or so thick. It is easy to stack and store, easy to buy, keep, give away, or throw away. As an object, it is user-friendly and routine, a mature technological form, hard to improve upon and easy to like. Many people … feel better at the mere sight of a book.

… The often beautiful cover of a book opens like the lid of a box, but it reveals no objects, rather symbols inscribed on paper. This is simple and elegant, too. The leaves of paper pressed together are reserved and efficient as well as cool and dry. They protect each other from damage. They take up little space. Spread open some information, but they don't offer too much, and they don't force it… Only while the reader is reading does it become a novel" [quoted from 6, p. 15].

➢ Based on the information in this section, describe the 21st century as a context for contemporary novels.

- Which new topics and subjects does the 21st-century novel encapsulate?
- When does "contemporary" fiction stop being contemporary?
- What do you think will happen to the novel in the next 20 years?

Read the excerpt from Ian McEwan's novel *Machines like Me* (2019) below and discuss the ways in which it reflects our present-day reality:

I grew up in a village near Stratford, Warwickshire, the only child of a musician father and community-nurse mother. Compared to Miranda's, my childhood was culturally undernourished. There was no time or space for books, or even music. I took a precocious interest in electronics but ended up with an anthropology degree from an unregarded college in the south Midlands; I did a conversion course to law and, once qualified, specialised in tax. A week after my twenty-ninth birthday I was struck off, and came close to a short spell in prison. My hundred hours of community service convinced me that I should never have a regular job again. I made some money out of a book I wrote at high speed on artificial intelligence: lost to a life extension-pill scheme. I made a reasonable sum on a property deal: lost to a car-rental scheme. I was left some funds by a favourite uncle who had prospered by way of a heat-pump patent: lost to a medical-insurance scheme.

At thirty-two, I was surviving by playing the stock and currency markets online. A scheme, just like the rest. For seven hours a day I bowed before my keyboard, buying, selling, hesitating, punching the air one moment, cursing the next, at least, at the beginning. I read market reports, but I believed I was dealing in a random system and mostly relied on guesses. Sometimes I leaped ahead, sometimes I plunged, but on average through the year I made about as much as the postman. I paid my rent, which was low in those days, ate and dressed well enough, and thought I was beginning to stabilise, learning to know myself. I was determined that my thirties would be a superior performance to my twenties.

Write a short paper about the way literature exists in the age of fast information acquisition and the popularity of social networks.

Test yourself:

1. Write down 5 most relevant technological inventions/instruments that compete with traditional fiction reading.
2. Write down 5 most relevant technological inventions/instruments that promote traditional fiction reading.
3. With a partner, find out the difference between the novel in the 20th century and contemporary writing.

1.2. Postmodernism is still alive

With the coming of the 21st century, our natural expectations of the literary progress can be narrowed down to some key questions: what is next? Are we in for a post-postmodern period? Is postmodernism still alive?

Literary production always lags behind those events and phenomena it reproduces and reflects. It is journalism that is produced in the moment; literature needs a temporal distance. To quote Nick Bentley, "In terms of literary form perhaps the style that continued to loom over the first decade of the twenty-first century was postmodernism, despite most commentators agreeing that the heyday of postmodern fiction and art peaked around the 1980s and 1990s in Britain" [5, p. 13]. No doubt, many early 21st-century writers continue to engage with narrative techniques, styles and approaches that reveal intersection with postmodernism, interrogating its legacies in a number of ways.

Let us revisit the postmodern techniques and style. First of all, when critics write about playfulness, relativity, multiplicity of themes and connotations, it is worth noting that many postmodern novels contain characters that lack depth, serve only as vehicles of ideas or are meant to tease and disorientate the reader. The American author Thomas Pynchon is notorious for these tricks. In his novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), for example, the character that initially appears and misleads the reader into thinking of him as the protagonist, eventually disappears from the narration.

Next, consider all those unnatural events that flood postmodern novels and are often termed as "magic realism". They defy the physical laws of nature and are often perceived by characters as more credible than reality itself. Tony Morrison depicts a literal human flight in *Song of Solomon* (1977), and Angela Carter, in her novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984), tells the story of a winged woman.

An abundance of totally unreliable characters inhabit the world of postmodern fiction. Some outstanding examples are: a young neurotic man in *The Rachel Papers* (1973) by Martin Amis, who is narcissistic and despises people; Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J. D. Salinger and Alex in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) are also neurotic and rather immature; John Self in Martin Amis's novel *Money*: *A Suicide Note* (1984). Confused, lost and despondent unreliable narrators are characteristic of some of Vladimir Nabokov's novels: Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1955) or Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire* (1962). This exercise in unreliability becomes very well practiced in later novels, like the ever hesitant and doubting History teacher Tom Crick in Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), a lonely and neurotic writer Michael in Jonathan Coe's *What a Carve Up!* (1994), another sensitive and obsessed teenager Carmel in Hilary Mantel's *An Experiment in Love* (1995), the hesitant and mind-changing Nicholas in Barry Unsworth's *Morality Play* (1995), and the over-imaginative teenager Briony Tallis in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001). The unreliable narrator (though always present in literary fiction) was a real

preoccupation in postmodernist writing; he/she was (and is) often used to tease the reader about their own capacity to believe or to know for sure (comment on other fictional narrators you have come across while reading postmodern novels).

The word "metafiction" is also immediately associated with postmodernism. In short, it is "fiction about writing fiction". Thus, in his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), John Fowles comments on his own writing, while his short novel *Mantissa* (1982) deals with the problem of how literature can produce good works of literature. The American John Barth continuously comments on the techniques he uses in his own book *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968).

Postmodernism was bold enough to come up with totally new genres which obtained quite complicated names, like "historiographic metafiction" , or novels which broadly speculate about history trying to reveal the ways history writes itself differently in different circumstances. Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) may serve as an example.

Self-reflexivity strongly marked the postmodernist novel, including the epistemological question – what is the nature of our knowledge? – and the ontological one – what kind of world is it and what are we to do about it?

Stylizations of all kinds, including the pastiche , mixing of the high and the low, of styles and discourses – are those linguistic features of postmodern novels which the authors believed would appeal to the readers of all intellectual levels, ages and interests. And the last, but not the least, are open or unclear endings in postmodernist novels. The notorious case is Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

In our age, nothing is impossible for a writer. He/she stops being only a story-teller. He/she can easily adopt any previous style and master it. He/she can change the gender-marked writing to challenge our prejudices (as I. McEwan does in his novel *Sweet Tooth*, 2012). A contemporary novelist becomes a specialist in a certain field of knowledge, which he/she masters in order to pass over to the readers, as the novel form seeks not only to entertain and instruct, but also to inform and educate.

Contemporary novelists writing in English (from Great Britain, Canada, the USA, etc.) – Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan, David Lodge, Salman Rushdie, David Mitchell, Kate Atkinson, Nicola Barker, A. L. Kennedy, Hari Kunzru, Toby Litt, Tom McCarthy, Ali Smith, Will Self, Jeffrey Eugenides, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ben Fountain, Jennifer Egan, Michael Chabon, Thomas Pynchon, Jonathan Franzen, Marilynne Robinson, Edward P. Jones, Junot Díaz, Colson Whitehead, Jonathan Safran Foer and others – continue to use narrative techniques associated with postmodernism, but they also adjust their issues, topics and subjects to the 21st-century concerns. Many of the authors named above will also appear in the sections discussing realistic genres and trends. A brief review of the novels in the 21st century that rely on a number of postmodernist techniques will spotlight some most prominent figures.

The inauguration of the century and the millennium coincided with the publication of a number of prominent novels in 2000 and 2001. **Kazuo Ishiguro**'s

first twenty-first-century novel is *When We Were Orphans* (2000). In it, the author offers a play with genres – a detective and a psychological novel with mentally unstable characters. It is set in the 1930s; the main character, the detective Christopher Banks, tries to solve the mystery of the disappearance of his parents. His own past and the memory of it only parody the classic detective fiction. Readers are provoked into believing something, but soon the assurance is withdrawn.

Ishiguro extends postmodernist tendencies in his later novels Never Let Me Go (2005) and The Buried Giant (2015). The events in ***Never Let Me Go*** take place at the mysterious boarding school of Hailsham, an experimental school for clones who are produced as donors of organs. The novel is translated into many languages. It was also adapted into an award-winning film starring Keira Knightley in 2010. (💬 2.8.)

In *The Buried Giant*, we meet an elderly couple – Axl and Beatrice. They live in a small medieval English town and their life is calm and measured. The striking thing about them, however, is an almost total absence of memory. During the rare moments of "clearing" of amnesia, the reader can catch some shards of memories from their subconscious and learns about the couple's son whom Axl and Beatrice decide to find. The rich intertextuality reveals the novel's feature of postmodernism: there are allusions to J. R. R. Tolkien and Arthurian legends, to the uneasy history of relationships between the Saxons and the Britons. The main point is still very unsettling: Ishiguro seems to imply that sometimes memory can be detrimental.

The Nobel Prize Committee in their award speech in 2017 pointed out that Ishiguro "is someone who is very interested in understanding the past, but he is not a Proustian writer, he is not out to redeem the past, he is exploring what you have to forget in order to survive in the first place as an individual or as a society" 🔊.

Ian McEwan's ***Atonement*** (2001) possesses the qualities of a war novel and a postmodern novel. The major role in the narrative belongs to the unreliable narrator, Briony, who is a teenager at the beginning of the narration and whose very limited perspective of what is happening around her predetermines the lives of several people. Misinterpreting the relationship between her elder sister Cecilia and her boyfriend Robby, Briony, in fact, wrongly accuses Robby of rape and sends him to prison. The destinies of all the three of them are thwarted and crippled by World War II. The metafictional quality is revealed in the final part of the book, when the reader discovers that the elderly Briony, a writer in her seventies, has actually made up the story of a happy reunion of the two lovers whom she caused injustice, damage and tragedy. The author makes us doubt the truth of what he is saying several times in the book. Besides, the narrative constantly revolves round the issue of truth, verity, and reliability of one's testimony. We learn a different kind of truth though: if some horrible injustice has been done, atonement can be achieved through writing, or rather, rewriting one's life story. (💬 2.5.)

David Lodge in his novel *Thinks…* (2001) combines several genres and makes this book a landmark of postmodernism. We can hear three narrative voices, those of the main characters – Ralph Messenger, the director of the Department of Cognitive Science, and Helen Reed, a writer and teacher of a Creative Writing Course – as well as the impartial third-person narrator's. On the surface, it is a campus novel and a love romance, where Helen and Ralph have an affair and also enrich each other's limited perspective of the world. In its depth however, the novel problematizes all things: love, the nature of knowledge, human brain, objectivity and subjectivity, contemporary society and the ontology of the body. Some parts contain postmodern experiments with style, others take the technique of stream-of-consciousness still further, making the "author" of this "stream" rather self-conscious of what he is doing. (🔎 Read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work further" section. Provide your comments.)

Another "inaugural" novel of the early 2000s is **Salman Rushdie**'s *Fury* (2001), in which the writer calls attention to various aspects of popular culture – comic books, films, cartoons, pop music and pop art, unlike the literature of high modernism of the 1920s–1930s, which was oriented towards the highbrow audience and alluded only to the very best artistic production. Rushdie's concerns about our modern world are the consequences of globalization, the contemporary New York City and the possibility / impossibility of escape from oneself in the metropolis. Malik Solanka, a millionaire, falls into the hands of his own inner demons. (🔎 Read a few excerpts from this novel in the "Work further" section. Provide your comments.)

Kate Atkinson's *Life after Life* (2013) experiments with chronology. It teases the readers by re-writing one and the same character's life several times. In each version, Ursula Todd is born and dies, but in the next life, she is capable of remembering something from the previous one and averts disasters. Each life period is connected with at a certain stretch in history, and the author examines the intersection between the social-historical and the personal. The most prominent postmodernist feature of the novel is its "alternative history", or the fictional prospect of "what if Hitler were killed in 1930".

David Mitchell's novels make confusions of characters' appearances and disappearances in various parts of the world, crisscrossing themes and historical references. In *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Mitchell's most outstanding novel, there are typical postmodernist interactions between the distant past and the narrative present. The manuscript "found" by one of the narrators, is presumably the 19th-century journal. A similar approach also characterized Antonia Byatt's *Possession* (1990), P. Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983). Peter Mitchell intersects nine historical periods applying specific modes of writing characterizing six different narrators whom he constantly interrupts. Then he picks them up again to complete their narratives and mirror-reflect

them in the second half of the book. Each first-person narrative is a text read by the narrator of the next one, which is definitely a tribute to postmodern playfulness with historicity. Nevertheless, Mitchell's style reveals what he called "levels of reality in the post-modern novel". He realizes the idea of postmodern pluralism and rhizome 📞 through the concept of a more globalized world.

The search for meaning in Mitchell's *Numeber9Dream* (2001) written in the genre known as "a coming-of-age novel", involves a dichotomy between spirituality and consumerism, naivety and crime in contemporary Japan. The main character Eiji is a typical young man (19 years old) who resolves to travel no matter how far to find his father (📞 find out what other novels, other works of fiction or myths have this basic motif / archetype) whom he has never met through his traumatic childhood. He goes to Tokyo and experiences both wonderful acts of kindness towards him and nightmarish horror of the criminal world. The narration itself reminds of the texture of a dream, and the reader is often confused between the actual events and the daydreaming, oneiric narration. The coming of age happens both in the physical dimensions of a large city and within the dreamed-up inner universe. Behind it, is a plain case of a dysfunctional alcoholic mother, a wealthy and already married man who abandons the mother and the child, who is finally left in the care of a grandmother. The search for father reveals inner maturity abandoning the need for a father. (🔍 Read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

A more resolute return to the "levels of realism" is exhibited in Mitchel's 2006 novel ***Black Swan Green***, which defies genre definition. It blends together the Ich-Roman, Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman and, as a result, comes out in a contemporary shape of the novel of maturity, or growing up (toeing an imaginary line with the genre of crossover literature – to be discussed in a separate sub-section). The narrator's virtuoso use of a specific idiolect – a mixture of teenage jargon, innumerable allusions to the culture of the 1980s, as well as metaphoric inner speech of a highly imaginative child – produces the effect of empathy in the reader. It is simultaneously a co-feeling of having experienced something similar in our childhood to this or that extent, of having been witness to the same historical and cultural events in the 1980s (whatever the country), and, which is most important – of sharing the common human experience of growing up – inside and outside. (💬 2.11.)

The Underground Railroad (2016) by **Colson Whitehead** is a novel that combines several genre characteristics and is very innovative in style and narrative mode. The novel raises, yet one more time in literary history, the theme of trauma and the shameful history of slavery. Together with the predominantly realistic mode of presentation, the novel abounds in brutal and shocking details. However, there is a distinguishable postmodernist quality in it, which transpires through an experimental genre of historical fantasy. The setting is the pre-Civil War Georgia.

The underground railroad depicted in the book is a vast rail system that transports runaway slaves from the South through long subterranean tunnels to the places – with stops under plantations and houses – where they can find freedom, though, in very different forms. Cora, the main character, abandoned by her mother, together with another slave Caesar also flee on the Underground Railroad. Arnold Ridgeway, the slave hunter, pursues the fugitives, and the reader also witnesses the historical events with their brutal realities of slavery (for example, weekly lynchings for the purposes of entertainment) and a fabled version of history. (💬 2.18.)

Jonathan Safran Foer's most unusual and wildly experimental novel ***Everything Is Illuminated*** (2002) immediately became hugely popular and was made into a film in 2005. The postmodern play with history, as well as presenting the tragic and gruesome reality of the Holocaust with an inimitable humour and originality, define the book's major narrative quality. There are two parallel stories, both autobiographical, about the events happening around the 1980s in the USA and Ukraine – the history of the obliterated town of Trochenbrod (Trachimbrod), a real Jewish shtetl in Poland, which suffered the Nazi destruction and manslaughter. The author combines utter myth and reality, resulting in a kind of magic realism, the presumably authentic manner of writing a Ukrainian boy might have used, a style that reflects the autobiographical detail, the reality of the Soviet Union on the verge of its collapse, and the tragic narrative of human destruction by fascism. (💬 2.7.)

In the new post-postmodernist American literature, there was an agitated interest in the new millennium. Thus, **Jonathan Franzen**'s new millennium novel *The Corrections* (2001) can be judged as a kind of "completion phase" for American postmodern writing. It both rejects and accepts the legacy of the postmodern novel. Upon the first encounter, its narrative mode looks traditionally realistic. However, the novel still carries out an extensive dialogue with the Bible and mythology, with American and world history, as well as with Franzen's postmodern predecessors. It is also riddled with language games. The story is of an average American family, parents and their three sons, who move from their childhood anxieties, complexes and inhibitions towards a more independent and personally liberal way of life. Franzen's 2010 novel ***Freedom*** was meant to break free from the writer's postmodernist concerns. In it, Franzen reveals our contemporary life focusing on love and marriage. Characters of all generations open the doors of their age problems, the privileges and burdens of liberty, adaptation to constant changes of our time. (💬 2.14.)

In a philosophical sense, such postmodernist sensibilities as radical scepticism about grand systems claiming the possession of truth, or grand narratives usurping the power to offer the interpretation of history and human nature, or total relativism and decenteredness – are no longer relevant, and the new pleiad of writers has begun to think beyond that limit. Many authors representing the literary scene today grew up with postmodernism as their major surrounding style and discourse. So to them it is no longer revolutionary, or innovative, or

challenging, it has become a tradition, a mainstream. As a result, to stand out in the era of new sensibilities, one has to become innovative against the stale innovativeness of the predecessors. The writers who established their position in the 1990s as representatives of postmodernist genres and forms – Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, A.S. Byatt, Angela Carter, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Jeanette Winterson, etc. – had contributed to the wide acceptance of postmodernist ideas to the point of their becoming political goals that had struck home. "By the 1990s, however, a certain amount of easy recognition of the ludic qualities of postmodernism meant that for most interested parties postmodernism was now just part of the cultural wallpaper" [5, p. 15] and contributed to its own end .

Work further

This passage is from David Mitchell's *Number9Dream*. Read carefully and say which of the dominant stylistic features of postmodernism are present here:

The bored horizon yawns. These tidal flats touch the Hyuga Nada Sea, south of Bungo Straits, where my great-uncle sailed on his final voyage aboard the I-333. If binoculars were powerful enough to bring the 1940s into focus, we could wave at one another. Maybe I will dream him, too. Time may be what prevents everything from happening at the same time in waking reality, but the rules are different in dreams. I smell autumn fruit. 'My, what a small world,' says Mrs Persimmon.

'Hello again. May I sit here?'

'Sure.' I dump my backpack on the overhead rack.

She sits as if afraid of bruises. 'And did you enjoy my persimmon?'

'Uh, it was delicious. Thank you. How was my dream?'

'Had better.' The weird old lady pulls her knitting out.

'May I ask, what do you do with the dreams you, uh, gather?'

'What do you do with persimmons?'

'I eat persimmons.'

'Old ladies also require nourishment.'

I wait for an explanation, but Mrs Persimmon gives none. A nuclear power station slides by, a frigate at anchor, a lonesome windsurfer. I feel I should make polite conversation. 'Are you going to Kagoshima?'

'Between here and there.'

'Are you seeing relatives?'

'I attend conferences.'

I wait for her to tell me what sort of conference eighty-year-olds attend – fruit farming? Stitchwork? – but she concentrates on her knitting. I think of atoms decaying. 'Are you some sort of dream interpreter?'

Her irisless eyes are not safe to look into for very long. 'My younger sister, who handles the business side of things, describes our profession as that of "channellers".'

I assume I mishear. 'You collect Chanel accessories?'

'Do I appear to be such a person?'

Try again. 'Channeller? Is that, uh, a sort of engineer?'

Mrs Persimmon shakes her head in mild exasperation. 'I told my sister. This word-meddling confuses people. We are witches, I told her, so "witches" is what we should call ourselves. I have to begin this row again. This is a scarf for my grandmother. She moans if it isn't perfect.'

'Excuse me – did you say you are a witch?'

'Semi-retired, since I turned five hundred. I believe in making room for the young ones.'

She is winding me up very wittily, or she is beyond mad. 'I would never have guessed.'

She frowns at her knitting. 'Of course not. Your world is lit by television, threaded by satellites, cemented by science. The idea of women fuelling their lifespans by energy released in dreams is as you say, beyond mad.'

I hunt for an appropriate answer.

'No matter. Disbelief is good for business. When the Age of Reason reached these shores, it was us who breathed the deepest sigh of relief.'

'How can you, uh, eat dreams?'

'You are too modern to understand. A dream is a fusion of spirit and matter. Fusion releases energy – hence sleep, with dreams, refreshes. In fact, without dreams, you cannot hold on to your mind for more than a week. Old ladies of my longevity feed on the dreams of healthy youngsters such as yourself.'

'Is it wise to go around telling people all this?'

'Whyever not? Anyone insisting it were true would be locked up.'

I vaguely regret eating that persimmon. 'I, uh, need to use the bathroom.' Walking to the toilets it seems that the train is standing still but the landscape and I are flying by the same swaying speed. My travelling companion is beginning to scare me – not so much what she says, but how she says it. I wonder how I should handle her. But when I return to my seat I find she has gone.

- Make a list of main techniques / features / devices characteristic of postmodernism (use those mentioned in the chapter and try to recollect others you may be familiar with having read such novels as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles or *Song of Solomon* by Tony Morrison).
- Which of the novels mentioned in this section appeal to you most? Why?

Read the excerpt from David Lodge's novel *Thinks*... The author makes a narrative experiment: the novel's main character Helen Read gives her students

a task to write a stylized essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" in the manner of any stylistically recognizable author. Martin Amis, Irvine Welsh, Salman Rushdie and Samuel Beckett were selected and successfully imitated by the students. Discuss the ways in which the author stylizes S. Beckett.

"Where? When? Why? Squeak. I am in the dark. I am always in the dark. It was not always so. Once there were periods of light, or shades of darkness. Squeak. There would be a faint luminosity from the mouth of the cave. When it faded I knew it would soon be time to leave the cave, with the others, to go fluttering through the dusk. Squeak. Now it is always dark, uniformly dark . . . I can feel with my foot-whisker that there is another beside me. He has a foot-whisker too, I feel it brush against me from time to time. Squeak. I say he, it could be a she for all I know . . . Squeak. Better to remain in a state of uncertainty. Uncertainty is unpleasant, but certainty can be worse…".

Below is one more example of this kind. Can you recognize, which famous author's style is being mimicked?

"What captivity has been to the Jews, exile has been to the Irish. For us, the romance of our native land begins only after we have left home; it is really only with other people that we become Irishmen. I once said to William Yeats that we were a nation of brilliant failures: but I have since discovered that in failure there is a great strength to be earned. The Irish nation has sought its bread in sorrow; like Christ it knows how weary the way has been and, like Dante, how salt the bread when it has been found – and yet out of these sufferings has sprung a race of incomparable poets and talkers. Of course exile, for me, has been a life-long romance. If I did not always bear the mark of the leper on my brow, as I do now, I have never ceased to carry the mark of Cain in my heart. And yet it is one thing to feel distinctive and so to walk apart, quite another to know that one is alone. When I climb the dark staircase of my hotel, I recall with the poet how steep are the stairs in houses of exile. Once the world watched me in amazement; now it has let me go, and does not care which direction I take in my wanderings. Goethe said of Winckelmann, that great scholar who abandoned the sombre house of his native culture for the free light of Hellenism, that 'the image in which one leaves the world is that in which one moves among the shadows'. Well, then, I shall be a perpetual boulevardier watching the angels – I presume there will be angels – hurrying by. I would go mad if I sat in this room for too long, among the relics of my former life. Regret and remorse rise up in front of me and the sight is intolerable: I flee from the hotel like a guilty thing and enter the streets. I walk joyfully through them only because I do not know where I am going – although sometimes, I believe, my companions do. It is remarkable how interesting life

becomes when one has ceased to be a part of it. In the old days, when my personality was the golden chain which bound me to the earth, the world seemed unreal, a painted scene against which I stood in relief like a satyr upon an Attic vase. Now it seems to me to be perpetually bright, renewed daily, quite meaningless in its expense of daily activity but wonderful nonetheless – as long as one does not care to pierce its mystery. And yet even this tires me: I can do nothing for very long. As a dramatist I looked upon other people as sources of amusement or pleasure; now they crowd around, and jostle me. It is as if their personalities invade me and leave me exhausted: I know that it is only in the company of others that one becomes truly oneself, but now I am positively Whitmanesque. I contain multitudes. Although I possess the wonder of Miranda, I have also the faintness of Prospero who forswears his art as soon as life has quite matched his expectations. I believe that poverty is responsible for my remarkable gift of passive contemplation. I used to think that the only way to waste money was to save it; I did not know that, when one no longer has green pieces of paper in one's pocket, one has nothing.

The following excerpt is from Salman Rushdie's novel *Fury*. What important issues are raised? Why can the style be regarded as postmodernist? What impressions / reactions / further speculations do these passages evoke?

He had come to New York as the Land Surveyor came to the Castle: in ambivalence, in extremis, and in unrealistic hope. He had found his billet, a more comfortable one than the poor Surveyor's, and ever since then had been roaming the streets, looking for a way in, telling himself that the great World-City could heal him, a city child, if he could only find the gateway to its magic, invisible, hybrid heart. This mystical proposition had clearly altered the continuum around him. Things appeared to proceed by logic, according to the laws of psychological verisimilitude and the deep inner coherences of metropolitan life, but in fact all was mystery. But perhaps his was not the only identity to be coming apart at the seams. Behind the façade of this age of gold, this time of plenty, the contradictions and impoverishment of the Western human individual, or let's say the human self in America, were deepening and widening. Perhaps that wider disintegration was also to be made visible in this city of fiery, jeweled garments and secret ash, in this time of public hedonism and private fear.

A change of direction was required. The story you finished was perhaps never the one you began. Yes! He would take charge of his life anew, binding his breaking selves together. Those changes in himself that he sought, he himself would initiate and make them. No more of this miasmic, absent drift. How had he ever persuaded himself that this money-mad burg would rescue him all by itself, this Gotham in which Jokers and Penguins were running riot with no Batman (or even Robin) to frustrate their schemes, this Metropolis built of Kryptonite

in which no Superman dared set foot, where wealth was mistaken for riches and the joy of possession for happiness, where people lived such polished lives that the great rough truths of raw existence had been rubbed and buffed away, and in which human souls had wandered so separately for so long that they barely remembered how to touch; this city whose fabled electricity powered the electric fences that were being erected between men and men, and men and women, too? Rome did not fall because her armies weakened but because Romans forgot what being a Roman meant. Might this new Rome actually be more provincial than its provinces; might these new Romans have forgotten what and how to value, or had they never known? Were all empires so undeserving, or was this one particularly crass? Was nobody in all this bustling endeavor and material plenitude engaged, any longer, on the deep quarry-work of the mind and heart? O Dream-America, was civilization's quest to end in obesity and trivia, at Roy Rogers and Planet Hollywood, in USA Today and on E!; or in million-dollar-game-show greed or fly-on-the-wall voyeurism; or in the eternal confessional booth of Ricki and Oprah and Jerry, whose guests murdered each other after the show; or in a spurt of gross-out dumb-and-dumber comedies designed for young people who sat in darkness howling their ignorance at the silver screen; or even at the unattainable tables of Jean-Georges Uongerichten and Alain Ducasse? What of the search for the hidden keys that unlock the doors of exaltation? Who demolished the City on the Hill and put in its place a row of electric chairs, those dealers in death's democracy, where everyone, the innocent, the mentally deficient, the guilty, could come to die side by side? Who paved Paradise and put up a parking lot? Who settled for George W. Gush's boredom and Al Bore's gush? Who let Charlton Heston out of his cage and then asked why children were getting shot? What, America, of the Grail? O ye Yankee Galahads, ye Hoosier Lancelots, O Parsifals of the stockyards, what of the Table Round? He felt a flood bursting in him and did not hold it back. Yes, it had seduced him, America; yes, its brilliance aroused him, and its vast potency too, and he was compromised by this seduction. What he opposed in it he must also attack in himself. It made him want what it promised and eternally withheld. Everyone was an American now, or at least Americanized: Indians, Iranians, Uzbeks, Japanese, Lilliputians, all. America was the world's playing field, its rule book, umpire, and ball. Even anti-Americanism was Americanism in disguise, conceding, as it did, that America was the only game in town and the matter of America the only business at hand; and so, like everyone, Malik Solanka now walked its high corridors cap in hand, a supplicant at its feast; but that did not mean he could not look it in the eye. Arthur had fallen, Excalibur was lost, and dark Mordred was king. Beside him on the throne of Camelot sat the queen, his sister, the witch Morgan le Fay.

Write a brief report about the postmodernist novels in the 21st century.

Test yourself:

1. Make a list of problems raised in the 21st-century novels, which emerged back in the 20th century.
2. Without going back to the text of this section, make a list of postmodernist novels of the 21st century in English.
3. Match the title of a novel and its major themes:

1. *Life after Life*	a) escape, life in a big city
2. *Fury*	b) gender, family, class, technology
3. *The Underground Railroad*	c) Holocaust, memory, guilt
4. *The Corrections*	d) slavery, racism, rebellion
5. *Everything is Illuminated*	e) reincarnation, alternative possibilities

1.3. New reality – new realism

From approximately that point in history, 9/11/2001, the novel took up a new turn – away from postmodernism – towards more realistic concerns. It is now possible to identify quite a number of twenty-first century novelists who have returned to the realist mode, continue in this tradition, reject postmodernism and look for new "realisms".

Realism is the oldest literary method, style and form, and in the history of the Anglophone novel it was already in use in the 18th century, and especially prominent in the 19th century (recollect the names of most prominent English and American realist authors of the 18th–19th centuries). From the start, as the fashion was set by D. Defoe, the writers sought to create the illusion that the fictional characters were real people living in the real world. The paradox, however, is that the characters were all totally imagined, and their life stories, for the most part, were fictitious. The relationship to the "real" was that these novels depicted the everyday reality which was often bitter and tried to hint at the ways of creating a better and happier one.

The main tenets of a realistic method in literature include a) claims for verisimilitude to the actual, real world; b) recognizability of the characters who represent social, political or psychological types; c) the dynamic of existence in history; d) a panorama of social life – as broad as possible; e) a strong moral and ethical stance – a clear representation of valid choices, humanist dilemmas, fair and just social order; f) irony, critique and satire of those phenomena – social or personality-related – which impede a fair functioning of society; g) conceptual views of a better and more tolerable social structure.

In the 21st century, realism, like all other literary trends, has undergone change and transformation. As Peter Boxall notes, "There is, in the fiction of the

new century, as well as in a very wide range of other disciplines and intellectual networks, a strikingly new attention to the nature of our reality – its materiality, its relation to touch, to narrative and to visuality" [9, p. 10]. Philip Tew also points out to a "new sense of reality" and, consequently, to "a new sense of the text" [37, p. 29], which he terms "metarealism". Irmtraud Huber stresses "some sort of a return to the real" [21, p. 28] . These new realisms encompass such aspects as psychological, ethnic and cultural, historical and social realism, etc.

In the twenty-first-century literature, realism functions through a range of various components, the main one being the vantage point and mode of narration. Even in outwardly postmodernist novels, experimental in their structure and composition, the writers lay bare the facts of life of their contemporaries, appeal to the realism of detail, to the verisimilitude of the psychological side of human nature, to the logic of the cause-and-effect relations, as well as the truth of life, which they no longer wish to make relative, debatable, playful or slippery. Even Ian McEwan in *Atonement* leads the reader to the conscious need to "create" the truth, to search for it and look for ways of establishing it.

Ethnicity represented in contemporary novels continues to reflect marginalization in society. In British literature, we can explore ethnic issues revealed with the help of a realistic mode in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), Caryl Phillips' *A Distant Shore* (2003). **Zadie Smith**'s ***White Teeth*** (2000) was famously described by the critic James Wood as "hysterical realism" indicating the tension between postmodern play and realistic portrayal where "the conventions of realism are not being abolished but, on the contrary, exhausted and overworked" [40]. The action revolves around two friends – the English Archie and the Bengali Samad, who struck a friendship during World War II. Their families are intertwined in multiple relationships, as the panorama of multiracial community life unfolds with all kinds of social problems: Muslim fundamentalism, animal rights, cultural tolerance, the Western and the Eastern systems of values and their coexistence and conflicts. Although, all the characters of the novel are totally imaginary, the realistic context of the late 20th-century Britain is laid bare (2.2.)

In the 21st century, realism acquires a more expressed appeal to the psyche, consciousness and memory. Actions in novels often take place in psychiatric clinics, mental institutions, paying attention to the overwhelming side-effect of living longer – mental disruptions and dysfunctional memory. Ground-breaking findings in psychiatry, neurology and other sciences studying the human mind (1.5) stimulate the search for meaning not only in the external logic of events, but also in the nature of our inner selves (David Lodge, Maggie O'Farrell, Salley Vickers, Julian Barnes, Mark Haddon, Ian McEwan, Emma Healey and others turn their attention to the inner self with the help of scientific knowledge).

Reality and truth are inseparable from the material and physical aspects of life. Therefore, contemporary writers address with increasing frequency the human body,

even in its deformity and disease. Ailments, mutilations, traumas, wounds and the suffering in flesh can be found in the novels of Sarah Hall, Pat Barker, Ian McEwan, Helen Dunmore, Jonathan Franzen, Siri Hustvedt, Teju Cole (🎥 1.6).

Another reality is the issue of aging in the 21st century. The problematics of old age appears with increasing rate in fictional works (*These Foolish Things* (2004) by Deborah Moggach, *The Sea* (2005) by John Banville, *Deaf Sentence* (2008) by David Lodge, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008) and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) by Julian Barnes, *The Buried Giant* (2015) by Kazuo Ishiguro, *Elizabeth is Missing* (2014) by Emma Healey, *A Spool of Blue Thread* (2015) by Anne Tyler) engaging the reader in the search for meaning among the eternal truth of human existence as part of nature's processes. The issue of aging in literary fiction emerged as a reaction to the increasing life expectancy, quest for elixir of youth, life prolongation techniques and other civilizational gambits to fight the infirmity of old age. The resulting side effect of all these stratagems – dementia – has been taken up as a curious fictional subject matter by talented novel writers. While a longer life does not guarantee the well-being of the brain and psyche, memory dysfunction and dementia induce an artistic and philosophical conceptualization.

Emma Healey's novel *Elizabeth is Missing* may be taken up for analysis as a case study. The novel is based on true-to-life everyday exploits of an 82-year-old Maud, who, in spite of severe dementia, manages to solve the mystery of her distant past like a prominent detective. Good humour, ingenious use of language and the profound knowledge of psychological reality are the markers of this quite original book.

Realism and its foundational principles are closely tied to the historical novels. Thus, Pat Barker explores the history of World War I. Hilary Mantel's incredibly profound research resulted in a masterpiece – a trilogy about the England under King Henry VIII and his chief minister Thomas Cromwell. Sarah Waters writes about the Victorian society in the 19th century. Helen Dunmore took up the topic of the Second World War and Stalinism in Russia, and Adam Foulds touches upon several historical periods as well (🎥 1.4).

The novels of **Sebastian Faulks** offer an exemplary case of what we termed earlier as "combinability". Starting from the theme of World War I (*Birdsong*, 1993), he tried his hand in versatile subjects and areas, including even psychiatry and neurobiology (*Human Traces*, 2005). However, his novel ***A Week in December*** (2009) is a showcase of the continuity of realist traditions in the style of Charles Dickens. (💬 2.12.)

The American writer Foster Wallace termed the realistic trend as "hyperrealism," "fiction of the image," and "post-postmodernism". The realistic novel, he argues, rejects ironic modes and attitudes of postmodernist literature, and instead, moves towards a more constructive moral engagement and the recovery of language's referential function.

The American novelist **Richard Russo** also presented a book of social realism – ***Empire Falls*** (2001) – the Pulitzer Prize winner for Fiction in 2002, which tells the story of a manager of the Empire Grill diner set in a small fictitious town. The author explores the psychology of a blue-collar worker in America. (💬 2.6.) As noted in the previous subsection, **Jonathan Franzen**'s ***Freedom*** provides yet another glimpse at the broad panorama of life in America. (💬 2.14.)

The writers of the new millennium genuinely try to record the authentic experience in various spheres of life, such as immigration, social activities, family life, social institutions and interaction with the government. With all that, it appears that "the age of clear answers is over", the truth is never explicit or categorical, and the fictional characters and readers alike must "have the courage to use your own understanding" (I. Kant).

Jeffrey Eugenides also followed that path of moving from experimental writing towards a renewed engagement with the realist form. In his opinion, all of his books fall into the "realist" camp. Nothing that happens in his books defies the laws of physics or departs from "reality." "The atmosphere of the book may seem exotic and feverish, but everything that happens could happen. In fact, many things in the book that people think I made up actually occurred during my childhood" [30]. This quotation from the interview can well summarize the nature of the contemporary realist novel, which also returns us to Aristotle's Poetics. (🔍 Read an excerpt from J. Eugenides' novel ***Middlesex*** in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

In Cormac **McCarthy**'s Pulitzer Prize winning novel ***The Road*** (2006), an imaginary albeit realistically probable post-apocalyptic America is shown. Two survivors, a father and a son, roam about the disaster-stricken landscape like "two hunted animals" in "the wasted country". Remotely reminding of *Robinson Crusoe*, the matters of mundane survival relate to broader questions. Counting, calculating, observing what remains of the natural environment, civilization and humanity – all these bring about knowledge, which is the result of experience. The realistic vein of the book also places emphasis on the values and ethics. (💬 2.9.)

One more significant sub-trend within the realistic paradigm is the so-called fictional (fictionalized) biography. Precedents include Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933), Robert Graves' two Claudius novels (*I, Claudius*, 1934; and *Claudius the God and his Wife Messalina*, 1934), *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) by Vladimir Nabokov, Antony Burgess' *Nothing Like the Sun: A Story of Shakespeare's Love Life* (1964), a whole range of Peter Ackroyd's novels, including *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983) and *Milton in America* (1996), Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *The Master of St Petersburg* (1994) by J. M. Coetzee and his *Summertime* (2009), *Nat Tate: An American Artist 1928–1960* (1998) by William Boyd, Hilary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell novels (*Wolf Hall*,

2009; and *Bring Up the Bodies*, 2012). "Fictional Biography is a genre wherein an author writes an account of a person's life where that person is actually a fictional character" [7]. Ina Schabert points out that both fictional and non-fictional biographies "represent the lives of historical persons by organizing as much factual evidence as possible within an interpretive context" [35, p. 4].

While some of the novels listed are engaged in an intricate game with readers and follow the postmodernist principle of undecidability, relativism of all biographical narratives, others quite self-consciously explore the meticulous facts from the historical figures' biographies. A curious tendency is observed – the conspicuous presence of a historical celebrity who is also a protagonist in a novel, while the novel itself is not a fictional biography of the said character. Such are the cases of **Pat Barker**'s real-life characters in a fictional work – psychoanalyst W.H. Rivers (1864–1922), the war poets Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) and Robert Graves (1895–1985) in her *Regeneration* trilogy. In Helen Dunmore's prize-winning novel *Zennor in Darkness* (1993), the author says: "This was also my first researched novel, set in the First World War and dealing with the period when D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda lived in Zennor in Cornwall, and came under suspicion as German spies" [19].

The new novel by **Anabel Abbs *Frieda: The Original Lady Chatterley*** (2018) is described by the *Guardian* in the following way: "A portrait of the novelist's German wife explores the price paid for inspiring her man" [2]. The biography of Frieda von Richthofen (1879–1956), who was married to several men, including the famous British author D. H. Lawrence, is recognizable and accurate. Her life is a journey through France, Germany, England, Italy, America, Australia ... This is a journey into her own deeper self, darkened by the strict patriarchal foundations of English society, the aristocratic principles of the noble family of the Richthofens, the desire of men to possess her, as well as the revolutionary movements of the time: feminism, the struggle of suffragettes, the birth of psychoanalysis, anarchism, avant-garde art. (🔎 Read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

One of the brightest examples of this subgenre is **Joyce Carol Oates**' novel ***Blonde*** (2000), where she reimagines the inner life of Norma Jeane Baker – as a child, then a woman, and the celebrity – who was that very idolized blonde the world came to know as Marilyn Monroe. Oates' style is always rich, and in this novel she shares intimate, sometimes bewildering facts and details with Monroe's own voice: her inner conflicts, gains and losses, myths and realities. Her image appears as both magic and devastating (💬 2.4.)

Since the mid-1990s, writers have begun to pay attention to the digital world, its electronic textuality that is ever-present and nonlinear. Back in Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), footnotes created something marginal between traditional print fiction and digital media, proving that the hypertext features and

other digital multimedia phenomena can also enrich our reading of fiction. A new genre of the "diginovel" has emerged (like Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013), and Jonathan Franzen's *Purity* (2015)). Though *The Circle* is a dystopia, it can still be associated with what Peter Boxall describes as "the strikingly new attention to […] materiality" in the 21st century fiction [9, p. 6]. Some experiments in this genre reach the borders of actual mimicry: there is a PowerPoint chapter of Jennifer Egan's novel (also a collection of short stories) *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011); in the half-book – half-work of art, *Tree of Codes* (2010) by Jonathan Safran Foer, there are cut-up pages; glossaries, maps, sketches, timelines, notes, etc. are found in William T. Vollmann's *Seven Dreams* trilogy (the final book published in 2001). Technical innovations, the AI (Artificial Intelligence) and its competition with the human mind are masterfully explored in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Clara and the Sun* (2021).

It looks like realism in the 21st century is testing new grounds, turning the virtual cyber world around us into reality.

Work further

- In what ways is realism different from and similar to postmodernism in the 21st century?
- Which issues do the authors of new realistic novels raise?
- Why are there several "realisms"?

Consider the following detailed descriptions of the two interiors in the novel *The Girl at the Lion d'Or* by Sebastian Faulks. Comment on the degree of detalization and the connection with the characters' social status.

a) There was an iron bed, a simple wooden chair, a small desk, and a chest of drawers with a pitcher and bowl, just as Madame Bouin had promised. A curtain in the corner hid a clothes rack that held a black uniform. Although the room was simple and small, the rafters tilted diagonally over the window gave it a sense of security, not of confinement; the agonizing Christ above the bed could be moved somewhere where he would be less visibly tormented; the bedclothes, though rough and thin, were clean; the bare floor, even if it was made only of planks and not of parquet, was cleaned; and above the desk hung a picture of a medieval knight.

b) The house was built from pale stone, and the windows and shutters were painted grey. In the middle of the long slate roof was a triangular projection, also slate-covered, into which was let a brick-surrounded dormer window. This had been boarded up with wood and now looked rather like the door half-way to the barn through which bales are loaded. On either side of it reared two thin rectangular chimneys in what appeared to be an unwise defiance of gravity. Some of the building

was covered with a dense creeper, spangled green and red, which helped to counteract the bleakness of the pale stone and the isolated position of the house on the headland. Theoretically it was sheltered from the sea winds by the finger of land that stuck out and by the dense pine forests on the far side of the lake it overlooked.

The following except is taken from a fictional biography. Try to guess, which of the novels mentioned in this section is quoted. What facts / biographical realities does it reveal about the character?

Frieda hadn't cared about money. It was life she wanted. Adventure. Discussion. Love. Ernest had offered them all. And then there was the promise of England: the very word seemed imbued with mystery, glory, passion. She felt the land of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Byron calling to her. A land of kings and queens. An empire that stretched to the very ends of the earth. A sceptered isle . . . a demi-paradise . . . a precious stone set in the silver sea. She repeated the word 'England', over and over, and felt it reverberate on her tongue.

Later, after a cringing meeting with Ernest's parents at Dover – his pious little mother scuttling and scraping in her darned gloves, his hunched father bobbing and stooping in a shirt leaf-thin from washing – the Baroness had flounced furiously back to Metz. When Frieda returned, her parents made it clear they no longer approved of Ernest. His obvious virginity had become a family joke, his pauper parents were a disgrace, his lack of class a crime.

But Frieda had seen something in Mr and Mrs Weekley's modest marriage that filled her with hope: the small gestures of affection and familiarity that passed between them, the devotion with which Ernest's father blacked the stove for his wife, the way she combed his beard every morning, and smoothed the creases from his trousers when he stood up. Little gestures of loyalty and love she'd never seen before.

In the early days of marriage she'd tried to do the same, brushing the crumbs from Ernest's moustache and straightening his tie. She picked buttercups and forget-me-nots, arranged them with a little foliage and placed them in egg cups on his desk. At breakfast, she laid his paperknife beside his post and cut the crusts from his toast. Things had changed after the children were born. Something had happened to Ernest, she wasn't sure how or why, but she'd felt slowly pushed to the very periphery of his life. Confused, she'd wondered if he no longer loved her, if he'd ever loved her. Her confusion had turned briefly to anger. After a few weeks, the anger settled and dulled into a fond acceptance of him, of their separate lives, and she'd thrown herself with great gusto into motherhood.

But on occasion her acceptance would spill over into a mute sadness. And always she sensed that a role had been thrust upon her. A role not quite of her own choosing. It was something she felt rather than knew, something she couldn't articulate. Until Nusch arrived, with all her talk of affairs and salons. Implying

that she and Elisabeth – neither of whom had an ounce of Frieda's courage – had somehow made their own lives and chosen their own roles. Lives that were unfettered and joyful. Lives in which they were loved with the sort of passion Frieda had always dreamt of.

➢ Which literary style – postmodernism or realism – do you find more productive for the new realities in the 21st century? Substantiate your arguments.

Read the excerpt from the novel *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides and discuss the ways in which his novel falls "into the 'realist' camp".

An Immodest Proposal

Descended from Asia Minor Greeks, born in America, I live in Europe now. Specifically, in the Schoneberg district of Berlin. The Foreign Service is split into two parts, the diplomatic corps and the cultural staff. The ambassador and his aides conduct foreign policy from the newly opened, extensively barricaded embassy on Neustadtische Kirchstrasse. Our department (in charge of readings, lectures, and concerts) operates out of the colorful concrete box of Amerika Haus.

This morning I took the train to work as usual. The U-Bahn carried me gently west from Kleistpark to Berliner Strasse and then, after a switch, northward toward Zoologischer Garten. Stations of the former West Berlin passed one after another. Most were last remodeled in the seventies and have the colors of suburban kitchens from my childhood: avocado, cinnamon, sunflower yellow. At Spichernstrasse the train halted to conduct an exchange of bodies. Out on the platform a street musician played a teary Slavic melody on an accordion. Wing tips gleaming, my hair still damp, I was flipping through the Frankfurter Allgemeine when she rolled her unthinkable bicycle in.

You used to be able to tell a person's nationality by the face. Immigration ended that. Next you discerned nationality via the footwear. Globalization ended that. Those Finnish seal puppies, those German flounders – you don't see them much anymore. Only Nikes, on Basque, on Dutch, on Siberian feet.

The bicyclist was Asian, at least genetically. Her black hair was cut in a shag. She was wearing a short olive green windbreaker, flared black ski pants, and a pair of maroon Campers resembling bowling shoes. The basket of her bike contained a camera bag.

I had a hunch she was American. It was the retro bike. Chrome and turquoise, it had fenders as wide as a Chevrolet's, tires as thick as a wheelbarrow's, and appeared to weigh at least a hundred pounds. An expatriate's whim, that bike. I was about to use it as a pretext for starting a conversation when the train stopped again. The bicyclist looked up. Her hair fell away from her beautiful, hooded face and, for a moment, our eyes met. The placidity of her countenance along with

the smoothness of her skin made her face appear like a mask, with living, human eyes behind it. These eyes now darted away from mine as she grasped the handlebars of her bike and pushed her great two-wheeler off the train and toward the elevators. The U-Bahn resumed, but I was no longer reading. I sat in my seat, in a state of voluptuous agitation, of agitated voluptuousness, until my stop. Then I staggered out.

Unbuttoning my suit jacket, I took a cigar from the inner pocket of my coat. From a still smaller pocket I took out my cigar cutter and matches. Though it wasn't after dinner, I lit the cigar – a Davidoff Grand Cru No. 3 – and stood smoking, trying to calm myself. The cigars, the double-breasted suits – they're a little too much. I'm well aware of that. But I need them. They make me feel better. After what I've been through, some overcompensation is to be expected. In my bespoke suit, my checked shirt, I smoked my medium-fat cigar until the fire in my blood subsided.

Something you should understand: I'm not androgynous in the least. 5-alphareductase deficiency syndrome allows for normal biosynthesis and peripheral action of testosterone, in utero, neonatally, and at puberty. In other words, I operate in society as a man. I use the men's room. Never the urinals, always the stalls. In the men's locker room at my gym I even shower, albeit discreetly. I possess all the secondary sex characteristics of a normal man except one: my inability to synthesize dihydrotestosterone has made me immune to baldness. I've lived more than half my life as a male, and by now everything comes naturally. When Calliope surfaces, she does so like a childhood speech impediment. Suddenly there she is again, doing a hair flip, or checking her nails. It's a little like being possessed. Calie rises up inside me, wearing my skin like a loose robe. She sticks her little hands into the baggy sleeves of my arms. She inserts her chimp's feet through the trousers of my legs. On the sidewalk I'll feel her girlish walk take over, and the movement brings back a kind of emotion, a desolate and gossipy sympathy for the girls I see coming home from school. This continues for a few more steps. Calliope's hair tickles the back of my throat. I feel her press tentatively on my chest – that old nervous habit of hers – to see if anything is happening there. The sick fluid of adolescent despair that runs through her veins overflows again into mine. But then, just as suddenly, she is leaving, shrinking and melting away inside me, and when I turn to see my reflection in a window there's this: a forty-one-year-old man with longish, wavy hair, a thin mustache, and a goatee. A kind of modern Musketeer.

But that's enough about me for now. I have to pick up where explosions interrupted me yesterday. After all, neither Cal nor Calliope could have come into existence without what happened next.

Write a short paper about those realities of the 21st century that require truthful representation.

Test yourself:

1. Name the writers – representatives of the realistic mode of writing in classical and 20th-century fiction.
2. What are the basic principles of a realistic novel?
3. Match the title of a novel and the social issue addressed there:

1. *Brick Lane*	a. tracing the science about the mind
2. *Middlesex*	b. ethnicity; marginalization
3. *Deaf Sentence*	c. class structure in contemporary America
4. *Human Traces*	d. identity crisis
5. *Empire Falls*	e. aging

1.4. New historical fiction

Recent British and American fiction has also taken a historical turn. The generic boundaries between historical and non-historical novels are not strictly polarized, as historical fiction includes elements of other subgenres (consider realist novels and fictional biographies, for example). (1.3.) Suzanne Keen writes that "Historical fiction is definitely the 'serious' type of literature which goes back to Walter Scott, and which was later practiced and shaped by some Victorian authors, including Ch. Dickens. On the other hand, historical fiction shares the same ground with popular literature, because it widely employs adventure and romance. The distinguishing mark, however, is that contemporary historical fiction is bent on representing traumatic events while aspiring to historical accuracy and invoking an empathetic response from readers situated far from the events and perhaps learning about them for the first time" [22, p. 57] .

The newly rediscovered and variously modified genre of historical novel continues to flourish in the 21st century, enjoying popular success. Nowadays it may include a wide range of works that deal not only with the past, but also contain biographical details and multiple settings which interact between the past and the present, different cultures and events. Some writers of the 20th century played a role in re-establishing the trend of historical writing, especially back in the 1990s: Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Beginning of Spring* (1988) and *The Blue Flower* (1995); Rose Tremain's *Restoration* (1989); Julian Barnes's *The History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (1989); Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989); Beryl Bainbridge's *The Birthday Boys* (1991), *Every Man for Himself* (1996) and *Master Georgie* (1998); Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991); Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991–1995); Jill Paton Walsh's *Knowledge*

of Angels (1994); Barry Unsworth's *Losing Nelson* (1999); Hilary Mantel's *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) and *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998). Many of these novels, however, followed the ludic (playful) principle of treating history, and some can be referred to the historiographic metafiction .

A. S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and Helen Dunmore's *The Siege* (2001) – the latter based on interviews with survivors and historical research to represent the tragic siege of Leningrad – introduced the contemporary historical novel followed by the outstanding new historical novels of Hilary Mantel, namely, her trilogy: *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) and *The Mirror and the Light* (2020).

The presence of women writers among the authors of historical fiction is quite remarkable. Beryl Bainbridge, Penelope Fitzgerald, Pat Barker, Hilary Mantel, Rose Tremain, Sarah Waters and Jeanette Winterson turned to historical fiction in the 1980s "as a way of escaping the feminist straitjacket, or just getting out of the kitchen" [14, p. 296]. These and other women writers still borrow from the rich tradition of George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Renault, Daphne DuMaurier and Margaret Mitchell. The contemporary British historical novel, according to literary scholars, "consciously re-interprets, rediscovers and revises key aspects of the period it returns to… these works are not set solely in the past, but conduct an active interrogation of the past" [32, p. 2]. 21st-century British novelists more readily turn to the periods of the First and the Second World Wars. However, there are outstanding novels exploring a much more distant past.

Hilary Mantel's place in this sub-genre is unique. A twice Booker Prize winner, she concentrates her invaluable research results and psychological insight on bringing back to the public eye some figures from the British history looming over the centuries. The so-called "Cromwell trilogy" is a long explorative narrative of coming from rags to power circles of Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540), an English lawyer, statesman and chief minister to King Henry VIII. It delves deep into the minds of Thomas Cromwell, King Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, Thomas More and other historical figures of the Tudor times. Henry's skulduggery, the intrigues, blind loyalties and despaired betrayals of his henchmen – all the gruesome events are presented through the prism of Cromwell's consciousness. (Read an excerpt from the novel *Bring Up the Bodies* in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

Hilary Mantel investigates the moral dilemma of good and evil as it applies to people who have great power. To get her discoveries across, the author takes upon herself the mission of a reader and interpreter of a historical figure's mind, she leads us through the mazes of human consciousness, its superior manifestations at the times of crisis and fall of old systems, turning points in cultural life and wrecking of political paradigms. The first novel of the trilogy, ***Wolf Hall*** sets the general mode for the other two books. (2.13.)

The historical novel in the United States of America has acquired a broader framework, getting the label "neo-historical fiction". What defines this genre after 2000, is the suspicion and scepticism about "truth". The contemporary American writers of historical novels (the genre is extremely popular, so the list may count hundreds of books) – E. L. Doctorow, Philip Roth, Gore Vidal, Thomas Pynchon, Joyce Carol Oates, Colson Whitehead, Jeffrey Eugenides, Kate Quinn, Viet Thanh Nguyen, James McBride, Bharati Mukherjee, Charles Frazier – explore both the national and transnational history. Discussing certain historical periods, the writers raise questions of authenticity and veracity of facts, as well as the degree of evidence and the level of authority of those whose testimonies and documents were researched by the novelists. The contemporary American historical novelists are more inclined to revisit the 1960s, a more recent period, and they interrogate the issues of race, war and trauma. Other popular periods for American historical fiction are slavery, the 19th-century Civil War, the restoration of the South.

Middlesex (2002) by **Jeffrey Eugenides** deals with the Greek-American immigrant experience in the United States, while the main character is a person who is genetically a boy raised as a girl, Calliope Stephanides, or Cal. She/he investigates the astonishing family history, uncovers a secret of the previous generations, which drastically changes her/his life. The novel received the following genre definitions: an American epic, a young adult (crossover) novel, historical fiction. (1.3.) Its themes are versatile and are often understood as pairs of binary oppositions: nature versus nurture, male versus female, sex versus gender, family life versus society, ignorance versus knowledge. It also continues the motif of pursuit of the American dream. While it is largely based on Eugenides's biography, it also broadly employs allusions to Greek mythology (the Minotaur and the Chimera) .

Against the Day (2006) is another epic historical novel by **Thomas Pynchon**. The time depicted is between 1893 and post World War I years. The setting covers the United States, Europe, Mexico, Central Asia, Africa. An array of about a hundred characters is aimed at creating a more objective picture of reality and history. However, Pynchon is a postmodernist author, and this novel follows the tradition of the historiographic metafiction, or metahistorical romance.

It the sequel to *The Sympathizer* (2015) awarded the 2016 Pulitzer Prize, ***The Committed*** by **Viet Thanh Nguyen** shows the wanderings of Vo Danh, a man who appears to be a constant refugee. He survived a communist reeducation camp, a sea crossing, an Indonesian refugee centre. The events of his life coincide with the marking points in the European history of the 20th century: Nelson Mandela's memory, the Bastille Day, the hapless multi-ethnic refugee community in Paris. Such historical periods as Communism in Vietnam and the war there are revisited by the main character who is evidently lost in the maze of different ideologies. (Read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

The transformation of the historical novel genre has resulted in a different view of history: it is no longer presented as something monolithic; rather, history is a "living process", which is re-lived in the novels by concrete historical figures, and the authors explore their minds and consciousness. At the same time, contemporary historical fiction seems to have abandoned the fashion for the so-called "alternative history" and the "historiographic metanovel". Instead, a historical novelist today resorts to the search for truth, at least for something that can be trusted, for psychological verisimilitude – basing on biographies, historical document and being very suspicious of official versions of historical records.

Historical fiction has shifted its focus from the great men and the countries they ran and conquered, to people and themes that previously remained in the background, as well as neglected topics, such as common people's daily lives and how they were affected (or not) by major events. The new historical fiction takes a revisionist stance toward established historiography. Often this coincides with a return to the storytelling tradition, especially from the marginalized perspectives of women or racial and ethnic minorities. The texts are also influenced by postmodern discourses of feminism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism.

The present political and informational technologies offer so many versions of "truth", even about our current moment, that the study of historical novels presents a good conceptual base to reflect on the issue of "making" or "writing" history. As many scholars have concluded, fiction has turned into a necessary instrument of historisation, as it can say / complement / testify what other forms of historical narratives cannot.

Work further

- In what ways has the historical novel changed from its classic examples?
- Think about and comment on this quotation about the new historical novel in the 21st century:
  "…the Historical Novel is in robust health, critically, formally and economically. In particular, the last few decades have seen an explosion in the sales and popularity of novels set in the past. Visit a bookshop or book website and the Historical Fiction section, in itself a relatively new marketing innovation, will be groaning under the weight of new work published by authors from across the world, and in numerous styles. The shelves will be shared by writers as diverse as Philippa Gregory, Bernard Cornwell, Sarah Waters, Ken Follett, Robert Harris, Dan Brown and Amy Tan" [18].
- Among the events that the historical novel explores, are the two world wars of the 20th century. Read an opinion that follow and comment on it:
  "… Writers of fiction and artists have seemed more effective in capturing the randomness and chaos of war than historians, social scientists, and military memoirists" [3, p. 30].

➢ Think about the following notions, which may characterize a historical novel: facts and alternative facts, truth and verisimilitude, knowledge and information, art and lies. Can you explain their meaning? What do you think is preferable in our contemporary response to history?

Read the quotes from the novel *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen and discuss the ways in which the problems of the war in Vietnam are brought onto the level of reflection.

"As Hegel said, tragedy was not the conflict between right and wrong but right and right, a dilemma none of us who wanted to participate in history could escape".

"What do those who struggle against power do when they seize power? What does the revolutionary do when the revolution triumphs? Why do those who call for independence and freedom take away the independence and freedom of others? And is it sane or insane to believe, as so many around us apparently do, in nothing?"

Comment on the following excerpt from one of Hilary Mantel's historical novels, the Booker Prize winning *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012). Can you characterize the way she treats the distant past?

These are days of omens and portents for those who value such things and can read them. The malign stories have come out of the books and are enacting themselves. A queen is locked in a tower, accused of incest. The commonwealth, nature herself, is perturbed. Ghosts are glimpsed in doorways, standing by windows, against walls, hoping to overhear the secrets of the living. A bell rings of itself, touched by no human hand. There is a burst of speech where no one is present, a hissing in the air like the sound of a hot iron plunged into water. Sober citizens are moved to shout in church. A woman pushes through the crowd at his gate, grabbing at the bridle of his horse. Before the guards force her away, she shouts at him, 'God help us, Cromwell, what a man the king is! How many wives does he mean to have?'

For once, Jane Seymour has a blush of colour in her cheeks; or perhaps it is reflected from her gown, the soft clear rose of quince jelly.

Statements, indictments, bills are circulated, shuffled between judges, prosecutors, the Attorney General, the Lord Chancellor's office; each step in the process clear, logical, and designed to create corpses by due process of law. George Rochford will be tried apart, as a peer; the commoners will be tried first. The order goes to the Tower, 'Bring up the bodies.' Deliver, that is, the accused men, by name Weston, Brereton, Smeaton and Norris, to Westminster Hall for trial. Kingston fetches them by barge; it is 12 May, a Friday. They are brought in by armed guards

through a fulminating crowd, shouting the odds. The gamblers believe that Weston will get off; this is his family's campaign at work. But for the others, the odds are even that they live or die. For Mark Smeaton, who has admitted everything, no wagers are being taken; but a book is open on whether he will be hanged, beheaded, boiled or burned, or subject to some novel penalty of the king's invention.

They do not understand the law, he says to Riche, looking down from a window at the scenes below. There is only one penalty for high treason: for a man, to be hanged, cut down alive and eviscerated, or for a woman, to be burned. The king may vary the sentence to decapitation; only poisoners are boiled alive. The court can give just the one sentence in this case, and it will be transmitted from the court to the crowds, and misunderstood, so that those who have won will be gnashing their teeth, and those who have lost will be demanding their money, and there will be fights and torn clothes and smashed heads, and blood on the ground while the accused are still safe in the courtroom, and days away from death.

They will not hear the charges till they hear them in court and, as is usual in treason trials, they will have no legal representation. But they will have a chance to speak, and represent themselves, and they can call witnesses: if anybody will stand up for them. Men have been tried for treason, these last few years, and walked free, but these men know they will not escape. They have to think of their families left behind; they want the king to be good to them and that alone should still any protest, prevent any strident pleas of innocence. The court must be allowed to work unimpeded. In return for their cooperation it is understood, more or less understood, that the king will grant them the mercy of death by the axe, which will not add to their shame; though there are murmurs among the jurors that Smeaton will hang because, being a man of low birth, he has no honour to protect.

Write a short paper about your experience / attitude to reading historical novels.

Test yourself:

1. Make a list of historical novels in English you remember.
2. Enumerate the historical topics popular with the 21st-century novelists.
3. Match the historical subject and the novel where it is described:

1. *Bring Up the Bodies*	a. a technological leap of the late 1900s
2. *Against the Day*	b. Leningrad during WW II
3. *The Sympathizer*	c. the American war in Vietnam
4. *Atonement*	d. the reign of King Henry VIII
5. *The Siege*	e. history of slavery
6. *Toby's Room*	f. World War II
7. *Underground Railroad*	g. World War I

1.5. The novel and consciousness

Contemporary fiction in recent decades has turned to the problems of scientific discoveries related to the human mind, consciousness and the brain. The novel has been trying to explore, explain, correct, modify and mystify those psychological issues to which natural sciences have not found any definite answer.

The following is what one of the US presidents said: "Now, Therefore, I, George Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the decade beginning January 1, 1990, as the Decade of the Brain. I call upon all public officials and the people of the United States to observe that decade with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities" . This was the proclamation that reflected the importance of the human brain as the place intertwining the mind and the body, the flesh and the soul, the material and the immaterial. It also reflected the "cognitive revolution" through which sciences – artificial intelligence, cybernetics, computer science, neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, linguistics, neurobiology – reached into the structure of the organ that commands all the internal and external processes in our lives.

This takes us to the role of science in artistic creativity. The first clearly marked signs of incorporating science into fiction can be found in John Donne's "alchemic" poems , in the Enlightenment novels, but especially evidenced in the book written in the naturalistic trend (Emile Zola, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Gerhart Hauptmann, George Moore and Thomas Hardy) at the turn of the 20th century. Novelists looked up to science in search of answers to the eternal question: why do human beings manifest such different characters? They looked into natural philosophy, biology, sociology and psychology to get a better understanding of those gaps which the sciences have not managed to fill.

The novel of consciousness, or the neuronovel, is a totally new genre. Ian McEwan's 1997 *Enduring Love* was one of the first examples, a response to the shifting perceptions of the brain and mind in contemporary scientific and medical research. This is how one researcher assesses the significance of the neuronevel: "the penetration of consciousness, the exploration of the workings of the human mind, and the mapping of a subjectivity that could both bear the weight of, and act as a lodestone for, the autonomous, liberal, perhaps even moral individual" [34, p. 84-5].

Now the time has come for modern concerns, such as: What is a person in the epoch of intelligent machines, clones, sex industry, epistemological doubt and language's alleged inadequacy, complexes, neuroses, and syndromes? The powerful influence of neuroscience has led to partial answers to these questions, one them being – "we are what our brain is". In other cases, the careful studies of the "grey matter" have revealed still other nuances requiring further research, for it still remains unclear how neuronal processes work inside the brain, and how the environment, upbringing, education, etc. help form our subjectivity.

David Lodge in his epochal work *Consciousness and the Novel* (2002) set out to investigate the notion of consciousness and the evolution of representing consciousness in literature. He offers many fascinating ideas about the novel of consciousness. Lodge states: "Literature constitutes a kind of knowledge about consciousness which is complimentary to scientific knowledge" [26, p. 16].

The brain and mind explorations have put curious questions for a number of novelists who make the debate between science and literature the main conflict in their fictional stories. The following review of books will highlight some really curious aspects of the contemporary novel.

David Lodge in his novel ***Thinks…*** (2001) builds a fictional case on his brilliant study of the cognitive theory of mind. The central conflict reflects the epistemological gap between cognitive science and the literary/artistic mind and their paradoxical interpenetration. This gap is created by the hegemony of technological progress. Thus, in *Thinks…*, the mystery of human consciousness is like the longed-for Grail, and the main characters Ralph Messenger and Helen Reed (with their homonymic speaking names) are the two methods of gaining possession of it: through the study of the physique of the human brain and mind and creation of AI (artificial intelligence) – Ralph's approach, and by means of centuries-old spiritual, mystical tradition and worldly wisdom (Helen's approach). The novel's message, however, is close to proclaiming, that it has ever been left to literature to describe and transfer the ungraspable and vague qualia[1] of human sense experience.

Mark Haddon in the ***Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*** (2003) explores autism[2]. The main character's behavioural symptoms coincide with the medical nomenclature, but the possibilities of a personality are shown to be much vaster, unforeseen and potentially unlimited.

Interestingly, the year 2005 saw an outbreak in the publication of novels of consciousness (neuronovels). **Ian McEwan** explores what is known in medicine as Huntington's disease (a neurodegenerative genetic disorder and dementia) in the novel ***Saturday*** (2005). This book is McEwan's response to 9/11, where he explores empathy, referring to his own essay: "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion and the beginning of morality" [28]. *Saturday* can be considered a "classical" neuronovel of the 21st century. Its main character is a brain surgeon

[1] Examples of qualia are the smell of freshly ground coffee or the taste of pineapple; such experiences have a distinctive phenomenological character which we have all experienced but which, it seems, is very difficult to describe (*The Oxford Companion to the Mind*).

[2] Haddon states: "i'd read oliver sacks's essay about temple grandin and a handful of newspaper and magazine articles about, or by, people with asperger's and autism. i deliberately didn't add to this list. imagination always trumps research. … if anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way. it's as much a novel about us as it is about Christopher [http://www.markhaddon.com/blog/aspergers-autism]. Nevertheless, an army of readers, critics, researchers and medical specialists clearly see the main character as a case of Asperger's syndrome.

who speculates about the biological basis of mental life and human personality. (🔍 Read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

Another work of this genre is **Sebastian Faulks'** ***Human Traces*** (2005) which took him five years to finish – he spent months in libraries reading psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, neurology, etc., and with charts and diagrams hanging everywhere on the walls of his study. *Human Traces*, in addition to being a novel of consciousness, is a story about relationships, a kind of romance. Both main characters' – Jacques Rebiere's and Thomas Midwinter's – year of birth is 1860 (Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859). The two young men start a friendship because they are united by a love of science, studying consciousness and the brain. They are motivated differently though. Jacque dreams of curing his elder brother Olivier of his "madness". Thomas is attracted by a more philosophical and abstract purpose: to find an answer to the question: What makes us human? Consciousness and the brainwork at that point in history were still *terra incognita*. Further peripetias bring about a rich variety of enlightening subjects. The young alienists/mad doctors get involved in life-changing personal relations with each other's relatives; they open a sanatorium high up in the Swiss Alps; they travel around the world attending famous psychiatrists' lectures, doing anthropological studies, offering their own concepts to the public. Discoveries about human "madness" and failures to explain it – let alone cure – result in both inspirational and disappointing conclusions, the major one expressing the novel's haunting message: "…what makes us mad is almost the same thing as that which makes us human". (🔍 Read an excerpt from this novel in the "Work Further" section. Provide your comments.)

Tom McCarthy's novel ***Remainder*** was also published in 2005. It is a story of a traumatized narrator who got a wound in the head. Paradoxically, he is very well-off in terms of money, but completely deprived of memory. It is his obsession throughout the novel to reconstruct his past even by paying others large sums as the price to regain memory.

Richard Powers in ***The Echo Maker*** (2006) makes up an enthralling story about a young man who has suffered a head injury as well and gets facial agnosia as a result. It is definitely the case for neuroscience, and a cognitive neurologist appears as a character in the novel, too (💬 2.10.)

Work further

- The quotations below depict a moment of opening a human skull – one is from Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday*, and the other is from *Human Traces* by Sebastian Faulks. Read and decide, which quotation is from which novel. Comment on the impressions, perceptions and speculations of the two characters separated by a hundred years' time.

a) “Opening the back of the head needed great care because of the vessels running close under the bone. Rodney leaned in at Perowne’s side to irrigate the drilling and cauterize the bleeding with the bipolar. Finally it lay exposed, the tenorium – the tent – a pale delicate structure of great beauty, like the little whirl of a veiled dancer, where the dura is gathered and parted again. Below it lay the cerebellum. By cutting away carefully, Perowne allowed gravity itself to draw the cerebellum down – no need for retractors – and it was possible to see deep into the region where the pineal lay, with the tumor extending in a vast red mass right in front of it”.

b) “For all the recent advances, it’s still not known how this well-protected one kilogram or so of cells actually encodes information, how it holds experiences, memories, dreams and intentions. He doesn’t doubt that in years to come, the coding mechanism will be known, though it might not be in his lifetime. Just like the digital codes of replicating life held within DNA, the brain’s fundamental secret will be laid open one day. But even when it has, the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch bound into a vivid illusion of an instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its centre. Could it ever be explained, how matter becomes conscious? He can’t begin to imagine a satisfactory account, but he knows it will come, the secret will be revealed – over decades, as long as the scientists and the institutions remain in place, the explanations will refine themselves into an irrefutable truth about consciousness. It’s already happening, the work is being done in laboratories not far from this theatre, and the journey will be completed, Henry’s certain of it. That’s the only kind of faith he has. There’s grandeur in this view of life”.

c) “I have cut up many brains to try and see, and, fortunately, I have not been alone. Many psychiatrists have noted something odd about the human brain. It looks symmetrical, but it is not. It is symmetrical in appearance, but not in function. Behind me – if Hans would be so kind as to switch on the projector. Thank you – is a large illustration of the human brain. All its parts, as you can see, are duplicated, mirror images, and for many years, that lovely duplication was taken as a sign of mankind’s superiority – a sort of divine symmetry, one might almost say.

‘Then, about forty years ago, a Frenchman called Paul Broca, when treating a patient who had lost the ability to speak – an “aphasic” in doctor’s terms – showed that the capacity for speech was located just here, on the left. The corresponding area on the right had no such function. Then a German called Carl Wernicke showed that another left-only area, further back and down, just here, was also implicated in speech and understanding. Again, the matching area on the right had no such function. It appeared that not only were the two halves of the brain

not doing the same things, but that one faculty – language, the very thing that made us better than the apes and little lower than the angels – was resident exclusively on one side!

'This is how Broca himself put it more than thirty years ago: "Man is, of all the animals, the one whose brain in the normal state is the most asymmetrical. He is also the one who possesses the most acquired faculties. Among these faculties – which experience and education developed in his ancestors and of which heredity hands him the instrument but which he does not succeed in exercising until after a long and difficult individual education – the faculty of articulate language holds pride of place. It is this that distinguishes us most clearly from the animals."

'So, clearly in Monsieur Broca's view, this is what made Adam different from He. That is not to say that Adam spoke at once; on the contrary, I should say the all-important change between the two was an earlier mutation which enabled the hemispheres of Adam's brain to develop differentially; and it was that mutation that gave us essentially two brains, which can both complement and back up one another, whose sum is greater than their parts and led to the vastly increased intellectual capacity of Homo sapiens over his precursor being; and thence to language, which opened the door to the development of "consciousness" – and to all that we now think of as characteristically human.'

➢ What assumption would you rather support: that what we are, is in fact, the product of our brain – or, that there is a *deus* outside of the *machine* ?

Write a short paper based on one of the novels of consciousness. How does the writer explain the phenomenon of consciousness? Can you agree with the novel's main idea?

Test yourself:

1. Which of the neuronovels mentioned reter to the general theories of human consciousness?
2. Which scientific discoveries are the neuronovels based on?
3. Make a list of problems that neuronovels raise.

1.6. The novel and trauma

One of the peculiarities of the late 20th-century – early 21st-century cultural discourse is the discussion of trauma and traumatic experience of different kinds. A scientifically precise understanding of the notion of trauma is complex. It involves such disciplines as psychology, neurology, psychoanalysis, philosophy,

military sciences, medicine. As J. Roger Kurtz points out, "We think of trauma as a pathological mental and emotional condition, an injury to the psyche caused by catastrophic events, or by the threat of such events, which overwhelm an individual's normal response mechanisms" [24, p. 2].

Literature opens an entry into psychic realms that may not be immediately accessible to a psychiatrist. Different types and forms of trauma have been imprinted on the pages of books: childhood trauma (as, for example, in Anne Beattie's or Joyce Carol Oates' stories), war trauma (notably, in Pat Barker's novels), the trauma of loss and humiliation (*The Catcher in the Rye,* 1951, by J. D. Salinger; *Never Let me Go*, 2005, by Kazuo Ishguro, etc.), grief and despondency (*The Other Side of You*, 2006, by Sally Vickers), rejection and guilt (Ian McEwan's *Atonement,* 2001), of violence witnessing, sexual abuse and bullying (J. C. Oates' and David Mitchell's novels), persecution and disaster survival (*Sophie's Choice*, 1982, by William Styron, *The Painted Bird*, 1965, by Jerzy Kosiński). What these and innumerable other books feature, matches exactly the trauma symptoms – altered states of consciousness, split selves, disturbed psyches accompanied by symptomatic obsessions, ritualistic repetitions, inexplicable aberrations.

The collective historical trauma, suffered not by separate individuals but by groups of populations and entire nations is yet another field of literary representation. Its description is relevant in the following quotation: "Double temporality of traumatic consciousness, whereby the subject occupies at one and the same time, both the interminable present moment of the catastrophe which, continuously re-lived, refuses to be relegated to the past, and the post-traumatic present that seems to come after but is paradoxically coterminous" [23, p. 3] – "consciousness operates simultaneously within multiple incompatible time-zones of being" [ibid.].

In Anglophone literary fiction, the traumatic experience of that form appears in novels and short stories about World War I and proves especially relevant in Pat Barker, Tim O'Brien, Sebastian Faulks, etc. focusing on both the war neurosis and PTSD . The Second World War trauma in Anglophone literature is explored by such writers as Kurt Vonnegut, James Jones, Helen Dunmore, Jerzy Kosiński, Thomas Keneally and hundreds of other authors.

Recent decades have also seen an intense outburst of research in the area of literary representation of trauma. Special interest for critics lies in such areas as the trauma of the Holocaust and of terrorism, trauma and its relationship to language and memory, the traumatic impact of a dictatorial regime, including the fascist state and its communist concoction, the Stalinist or North Korean crucible. Most well-known are dystopian texts by George Orwell, Aldous Huxley or Margaret Atwood. Alison Tange states, that these "are all memory stories that deal with survival of a traumatic past…" [36, p. 33].

The English writer **Helen Dunmore** addressed the recent history of the Soviet Union in two of her novels. In ***The Betrayal*** (2010), the life of soviet citizens

immediately following WW II is genuinely reproduced. The book looks at the phenomenon of trauma that inevitably sets in in a regime where each and every is a potential enemy, spy, subverter or saboteur. The Stalinist dictatorship covers a time span – from 1927 to 1953 (26 years) – long enough to generate a persisting intergenerational collective historical trauma, its most vivid symptoms being fear, immature and destructive psychologicol defence mechanisms , and ultimately – depression and suicidal spells. The novel explores the trauma of dictatorship and its extreme and perverted manifestations. It is based on a fictional case with a realistic sublayer – "the Doctors' Plot"; the author acknowledges the sources she used – an impressive list of documentary and historical books and articles, which adds verisimilitude, credibility and a sense of lived experience to the narration.

Dunmore also addresses the issue of WW I, which, for Britain, was even more devastating and traumatic than the WW II. In her novel ***The Lie*** (2014) she employs the figure of a deeply traumatized young man Daniel who returns to his village only to perish following the ghost of his dead friend. (2.17.)

John Boyne's Holocaust novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) is a fictional tale of two friends: the son of a Nazi commandant and a Jewish concentration camp inmate. Though this friendship is not a likely thing to have happened in reality, it strikes home when the German boy Bruno is killed in a gas chamber with his Jewish friend Shmuel because of wearing the same striped pyjamas, and his father slowly understands that his own machinery of destruction has killed his own son.

In ***White Teeth*** (2000) **Zadie Smith** explores the postcolonial diaspora trauma, that can apply to the family of the main character, the Iqbals originating from Bangladesh: the suffering at the centre of former colonial power, the difficulties of establishing a relationship that is not based on the dominance of centre over margins. The author interrogates the historical and political contexts in which this trauma originates and explores the continuous traumatising potential of neo-colonial ideologies. (2.2.)

Collective traumas always correlate with moments of historical crises (in the 20th century, such were the two world wars, the Holocaust, fascism, the horrors of Stalinism and other similar regimes, colonization, the wars in Afghanistan – with the USA involvement, and later, the USSR, the Chernobyl catastrophe and terrorist attacks). The 1990s saw the great public resonance of the Booker Prize winning novels by Par Barker (the remarkable trilogy *Regeneration*: the title novel (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995)) who focused on the war trauma, the hurtful impact of the great massacre of WW I. Traumatic memories haunt the main character of William Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002), featuring the Irish War of Independence.

The novels of trauma also bring to our attention the less obvious but no less damaging individual traumas associated with patriarchal ideology and abuse, violence and loss of lives, sexual trauma and the trauma of love – a universal

topos in world literature. **Margaret Atwood**'s novel ***The Blind Assassin*** (2000), which won the Booker Prize the same year it was published, explores the depths of women's vulnerable position, dark family secrets, the consequences of suicide and rape against the background of the immediate post World War II years. (2.3.) **Donna Tartt**'s novel ***The Goldfinch*** (2013) is an example of masterful combination of a realistic detail and trauma narrative. Critical reception of this impressive book was as complex and contradictory as the novel itself. While the narrative affects us by sensory detail, it also expresses "cosmic angst", keeps the reader in suspense by a thrilling action, and conducts an inquiry into the trauma of survival, and the healing possibilities of art. (2.16.)

The authors of trauma narratives often choose realism to convey the extreme and painful experience, to evoke life in the trenches (Pat Barker), to show the maddening fear and suffering of Stalin's victims (Helen Dunmore), to share the pain after the loss of a child (Ian **McEwan**'s novel *The Child in Time,* 1987). Alan Hollinghurst's 2004 Man Booker Prize-winning novel *The Line of Beauty* depicts a bright and well-educated character, Nick Guest, attempting to solve the trauma of gayness, his intimate relationship with the Fedden family, and his obsessive aestheticism . It explores themes of hypocrisy, privilege, Oscar Wilde's concept of beauty, which, as represented by the Feddens, actually turns out to be the ugly.

According to Sigmund Freud, trauma is not just remembered, but repeated in the present. Writers resort to different modes of writing about trauma and, in fact, writing down the trauma itself. Thus, Pat Barker employs crude and gritty realism, Martin Amis (in *Time's Arrow*, 1991) practiced the most sophisticated postmodernist tricks, and some writers may even adopt romance as a mode (Graham Swift, Adam Thorpe, Kate Atkinson). The narrative mode for representing trauma may incorporate repetition, indirection, and a breakdown of temporality.

Pat Barker in her novel ***Toby's Room*** (2012), faithful to her characteristic manner, builds the narration largely on the research she carried out on the issue of all sorts of war trauma, physiological as well as psychic, mixing up imaginary characters with real life figures, preserving names of people and places. *Toby's Room* is also an allusion to Virginia Woolf's celebrated book *Jacob's Room* (1922) and its author's brother Toby whom V. Woolf lost in 1906 and whose life served as basis for the novel mentioned. Barker's main heroine Elinor loses her brother Toby to World War I. Herself an artist, first a student at the Slade School of Fine Arts and then a medical illustrator at Queen Mary's Hospital for facial surgery, Elinor is also trapped between her fatal and forbidden love for her brother, the medical student and later a military doctor, and her search for the truth about Toby's gruesome death at the front. (2.15.)

Sarah Waters' ***The Little Stranger*** (2009) takes the form of ghost story to explore the collective trauma of class, war and memory, depressive rationing,

homelessness, post-war gloom and austerity. **Martin Amis**' ***House of Meetings*** (2006) depicts, in a form of the unnamed narrator's memoirs, two brothers' life in a Soviet gulag during the last decade of Stalin's rule. After the survival, the scars of trauma make it painful for them to adapt to normal life again. **Adam Thorpe**'s ***Nineteen Twenty-One*** (2001) is the story of a writer who tries to make sense of the devastating and traumatic events of the Great War; in ***The Rules of Perspective*** (2005) the narrative shifts back and forth between several very different groups of WW II survivors: civilians, members of the occupying Anglo-American army, and an anonymous hidden Jewish girl; ***The Standing Pool*** (2008) depicts violence and the looming shadow of WW II: "A hangover from the war. All those German atrocities. Sins of the fathers" [39, 121]. The burden of past evils thus lingers on, marking the transgenerational legacy of traumatic history.

What has followed into the 21st century, is perhaps the deeply-rooted realization of the psychological impact, individual and collective, of history, the reshaping and reworking of the traumatic past.

Work further

- Comment on these quotations about trauma as a psychic phenomenon, and a mode of fictional representation in the 21st century.
  a) "…a physical trauma is something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by usual mental processes. We have, as it were, nowhere to put it, and so it falls out of our conscious memory, yet is still present in the mind like an intruder or a ghost" [27, p. 497].
  b) "Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning…. Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life…. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe" [20].
- Which of the trauma novels have you read? Did these novels make a strong impact on you?
- Why do you think trauma fiction has come to the fore in the 21st century?
- What is your personal understanding of trauma and the novel of trauma?

Read the excerpt from the novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and comment on the unreliable narrator's perspective in it. What do you think "Out-With" means? How well does John Boyne create the environment for exploring the traumatic experience?

But the best thing was that he had a friend called Shmuel.

He enjoyed walking along the fence every afternoon and was pleased to see that his friend seemed a lot happier these days and his eyes didn't seem so sunken, although his body was still ridiculously skinny and his face unpleasantly grey.

One day, while sitting opposite him at their usual place, Bruno remarked, 'This is the strangest friendship I've ever had.'

'Why?' asked Shmuel.

'Because every other boy I've ever been friends with has been someone that I've been able to play with,' he replied. 'And we never get to play together. All we get to do is sit here and talk.'

'I like sitting here and talking,' said Shmuel.

'Well, I do too of course,' said Bruno. 'But it's a pity we can't do something more exciting from time to time. A bit of exploring, perhaps. Or a game of football. We've never even seen each other without all this wire fencing in the way.'

Bruno often made comments like this because he wanted to pretend that the incident a few months earlier when he had denied his friendship with Shmuel had never taken place. It still preyed on his mind and made him feel bad about himself, although Shmuel, to his credit, seemed to have forgotten all about it.

'Maybe someday we will,' said Shmuel. 'If they ever let us out.'

Bruno started to think more and more about the two sides of the fence and the reason it was there in the first place. He considered speaking to Father or Mother about it but suspected that they would either be angry with him for mentioning it or tell him something unpleasant about Shmuel and his family, so instead he did something quite unusual. He decided to talk to the Hopeless Case.

Gretel's room had changed quite considerably since the last time he had been there. For one thing there wasn't a single doll in sight. One afternoon a month or so earlier, around the time that Lieutenant Kotler had left Out-With, Gretel had decided that she didn't like dolls any more and had put them all into four large bags and thrown them away. In their place she had hung up maps of Europe that Father had given her, and every day she put little pins into them and moved the pins around constantly after consulting the daily newspaper. Bruno thought she might be going mad. But still, she didn't tease him or bully him as much as she used to, so he thought there could be no harm in talking to her.

'Hello,' he said, knocking politely on her door because he knew how angry she always got if he just went in.

'What do you want?' asked Gretel, who was sitting at her dressing table, experimenting with her hair.

'Nothing,' said Bruno.

'Then go away.'

Bruno nodded but came inside anyway and sat down on the side of the bed. Gretel watched him from out of the side of her eyes but didn't say anything.

'Gretel,' he said finally, 'can I ask you something?'

'If you make it quick,' she said.

'Everything here at Out-With –' he began, but she interrupted him immediately.

'It's not called Out-With, Bruno,' she said angrily, as if this was the worst mistake anyone had ever made in the history of the world. 'Why can't you pronounce it right?'

'It is called Out-With,' he protested.

'It's not,' she insisted, pronouncing the name of the camp correctly for him.

Bruno frowned and shrugged his shoulders at the same time. 'But that's what I said,' he said.

'No it's not. Anyway, I'm not going to argue with you,' said Gretel, losing her patience already, for she had very little of it to begin with. 'What is it anyway? What do you want to know?'

'I want to know about the fence,' he said firmly, deciding that this was the most important thing to begin with. 'I want to know why it's there.'

Gretel turned round in her chair and looked at him curiously. 'You mean you don't know?' she asked.

'No,' said Bruno. 'I don't understand why we're not allowed on the other side of it. What's so wrong with us that we can't go over there and play?'

Gretel stared at him and then suddenly started laughing, only stopping when she saw that Bruno was being perfectly serious.

'Bruno,' she said in a childish voice, as if this was the most obvious thing in the world, 'the fence isn't there to stop us from going over there. It's to stop them from coming over here.'

Bruno considered this but it didn't make things any clearer. 'But why?' he asked.

'Because they have to be kept together,' explained Gretel.

'With their families, you mean?'

'Well, yes, with their families. But with their own kind too.'

'What do you mean, their own kind?'

Gretel sighed and shook her head. 'With the other Jews, Bruno. Didn't you know that? That's why they have to be kept together. They can't mix with us.'

'Jews,' said Bruno, testing the word out. He quite liked the way it sounded. 'Jews,' he repeated. 'All the people over that side of the fence are Jews.'

'Yes, that's right,' said Gretel.

'Are we Jews?'

Gretel opened her mouth wide, as if she had been slapped in the face. 'No, Bruno,' she said. 'No, we most certainly are not. And you shouldn't even say something like that.'

'But why not? What are we then?'

'We're…' began Gretel, but then she had to stop to think about it. 'We're…' she repeated, but she wasn't quite sure what the answer to this question really was. 'Well we're not Jews,' she said finally.

'I know we're not,' said Bruno in frustration. 'I'm asking you, if we're not Jews, what are we instead?'

'We're the opposite,' said Gretel, answering quickly and sounding a lot more satisfied with this answer. 'Yes, that's it. We're the opposite.'

'All right,' said Bruno, pleased that he had it settled in his head at last. 'And the Opposite live on this side of the fence and the Jews live on that.'

'That's right, Bruno.'

'Don't the Jews like the Opposite then?'

'No, it's us who don't like them, stupid.'

Bruno frowned. Gretel had been told time and time again that she wasn't allowed to call him stupid but still she persisted with it.

'Well, why don't we like them?' he asked.

'Because they're Jews,' said Gretel.

'I see. And the Opposite and the Jews don't get along.'

'No, Bruno,' said Gretel, but she said this slowly because she had discovered something unusual in her hair and was examining it carefully.

'Well, can't someone just get them together and –'

Bruno was interrupted by the sound of Gretel breaking into a piercing scream; one that woke Mother up from her afternoon nap and brought her running into the bedroom to find out which of her children had murdered the other one.

While experimenting with her hair Gretel had found a tiny egg, no bigger than the top of a pin. She showed it to Mother, who looked through her hair, pulling strands of it apart quickly, before marching over to Bruno and doing the same thing to him.

'Oh, I don't believe it,' said Mother angrily. 'I knew something like this would happen in a place like this.'

It turned out that both Gretel and Bruno had lice in their hair, and Gretel had to be treated with a special shampoo that smelled horrible and afterwards she sat in her room for hours on end, crying her eyes out.

Bruno had the shampoo as well, but then Father decided that the best thing was for him to start afresh and he got a razor and shaved all Bruno's hair off, which made Bruno cry. It didn't take long and he hated seeing all his hair float down from his head and land on the floor at his feet, but Father said it had to be done.

Afterwards Bruno looked at himself in the bathroom mirror and he felt sick. His entire head looked misshapen now that he was bald and his eyes looked too big for his face. He was almost scared of his own reflection.

'Don't worry,' Father reassured him. 'It'll grow back. It'll only take a few weeks.'

'It's the filth around here that did it,' said Mother. 'If some people could only see the effect this place is having on us all.'

When he saw himself in the mirror Bruno couldn't help but think how much like Shmuel he looked now, and he wondered whether all the people on that side of the fence had lice as well and that was why all their heads were shaved too.

When he saw his friend the next day Shmuel started to laugh at Bruno's appearance, which didn't do a lot for his dwindling self-confidence.

'I look just like you now,' said Bruno sadly, as if this was a terrible thing to admit.

'Only fatter,' admitted Shmuel.

Over the course of the next few weeks Mother seemed increasingly unhappy with life at Out-With and Bruno understood perfectly well why that might be. After all, when they'd first arrived he had hated it, due to the fact that it was nothing like home and lacked such things as three best friends for life. But that had changed for him over time, mostly due to Shmuel, who had become more important to him than Karl or Daniel or Martin had ever been. But Mother didn't have a Shmuel of her own. There was no one for her to talk to, and the only person who she had been remotely friendly with – the young Lieutenant Kotler – had been transferred somewhere else.

Although he tried not to be one of those boys who spends his time listening at keyholes and down chimneys, Bruno was passing by Father's office one afternoon while Mother and Father were inside having one of their conversations. He didn't mean to eavesdrop, but they were talking quite loudly and he couldn't help but overhear.

'It's horrible,' Mother was saying. 'Just horrible. I can't stand it any more.'

'We don't have any choice,' said Father. 'This is our assignment and – '

'No, this is your assignment,' said Mother. 'Your assignment, not ours. You stay if you want to.'

'And what will people think,' asked Father, 'if I permit you and the children to return to Berlin without me? They will ask questions about my commitment to the work here.'

'Work?' shouted Mother. 'You call this work?'

Bruno didn't hear much more because the voices were getting closer to the door and there was always a chance that Mother would come storming out in search of a medicinal sherry, so he ran back upstairs instead. Still, he had heard enough to know that there was a chance they might be returning to Berlin, and to his surprise he didn't know how to feel about that.

There was one part of him that remembered that he had loved his own life back there, but so many things would have changed by now. Karl and the other two best friends whose names he couldn't remember would probably have forgotten about him by now. Grandmother was dead and they almost never heard from Grandfather, who Father said had gone senile.

But on the other hand he'd grown used to life at Out-With: he didn't mind Herr Liszt, he'd become much friendlier with Maria than he ever had been back in Berlin, Gretel was still going through a phase and keeping out of his way (and she didn't seem to be quite so much of a Hopeless Case any more) and his afternoon conversations with Shmuel filled him with happiness.

Bruno didn't know how to feel and decided that whatever happened, he would accept the decision without complaint.

Nothing at all changed for a few weeks; life went on as normal. Father spent most of his time either in his office or on the other side of the fence. Mother kept very quiet during the day and was having an awful lot more of her afternoon naps, some of them not even in the afternoon but before lunch, and Bruno was worried for her health because he'd never known anyone need quite so many medicinal sherries. Gretel stayed in her room concentrating on the various maps she had pasted on the walls and consulting the newspapers for hours at a time before moving the pins around a little. (Herr Liszt was particularly pleased with her for doing this.)

And Bruno did exactly what was asked of him and caused no chaos at all and enjoyed the fact that he had one secret friend whom no one knew about.

Then one day Father summoned Bruno and Gretel into his office and informed them of the changes that were to come.

'Sit down, children,' he said, indicating the two large leather armchairs that they were usually told not to sit in when they had occasion to visit Father's office because of their grubby mitts. Father sat down behind his desk. 'We've decided to make a few changes,' he continued, looking a little sad as he spoke. 'Tell me this: are you happy here?'

'Yes, Father, of course,' said Gretel.

'Certainly, Father,' said Bruno.

'And you don't miss Berlin at all?'

The children paused for a moment and glanced at each other, wondering which one of them was going to commit to an answer. 'Well, I miss it terribly,' said Gretel eventually. 'I wouldn't mind having some friends again.'

Bruno smiled, thinking about his secret.

'Friends,' said Father, nodding his head. 'Yes, I've often thought of that. It must have been lonely for you at times.'

'Very lonely,' said Gretel in a determined voice.

'And you, Bruno,' asked Father, looking at him now. 'Do you miss your friends?'

'Well, yes,' he replied, considering his answer carefully. 'But I think I'd miss people no matter where I went.' That was an indirect reference to Shmuel but he didn't want to make it any more explicit than that.

'But would you like to go back to Berlin?' asked Father. 'If the chance was there?'

'All of us?' asked Bruno.

Father gave a deep sigh and shook his head. 'Mother and Gretel and you. Back to our old house in Berlin. Would you like that?'

Bruno thought about it. 'Well, I wouldn't like it if you weren't there,' he said, because that was the truth.

'So you'd prefer to stay here with me?'

'I'd prefer all four of us to stay together,' he said, reluctantly including Gretel in that. 'Whether that was in Berlin or Out-With.'

'Oh, Bruno!' said Gretel in an exasperated voice, and he didn't know whether that was because he might be spoiling the plans for their return or because (according to her) he continued to mispronounce the name of their home.

'Well, for the moment I'm afraid that's going to be impossible,' said Father. 'I'm afraid that the Fury will not relieve me of my command just yet. Mother, on the other hand, thinks this would be a good time for the three of you to return home and reopen the house, and when I think about it…' He paused for a moment and looked out of the window to his left – the window that led off to a view of the camp on the other side of the fence. 'When I think about it, perhaps she is right. Perhaps this is not a place for children.'

'There are hundreds of children here,' said Bruno, without really thinking about his words before saying them. 'Only they're on the other side of the fence.'

A silence followed this remark, but it wasn't like a normal silence where it just happens that no one is talking. It was like a silence that was very noisy. Father and Gretel stared at him and he blinked in surprise.

'What do you mean there are hundreds of children over there?' asked Father. 'What do you know of what goes on over there?'

Write down a few passages where you would give strong arguments FOR or AGAINST the novel of trauma.

Test yourself:

1. List some traumatic events that can be represented in the novel of trauma.
2. Make a list of writers who depict the First World War trauma.
3. What authors turn to the trauma of the Second World War?
4. Which other types of trauma are found in this subgenre?

1.7. The eco-novel

Our contemporary world is facing some of the most unprecedented environmental challenges ever encountered throughout the existence of the planet: climate change, global warming, man-made technogenic catastrophes. The impacts of environmental cataclysms are omnipresent: increased levels of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere, the rising sea level, increases in global temperatures, disruption to normal seasonal cycles, changes in precipitation patterns, droughts, hurricanes and flooding, melting glaciers ( comment on this and recollect some of the natural disasters – men-caused or other). The year 2005 already saw the first wave of climate change refugees (in Papua New Guinea) because of the rising ocean level and the submerging island.

As a result, there appears a new notion – the Anthropocene – "a proposed geological epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems" (Wikipedia). This is the full acknowledgement of the capability of the contemporary human civilization to influence the environment on the global and even cosmic scales. Together with that, it is also universally acknowledged that it is well within our capacity to change the world for the better as well as for the worse. Hence, the ubiquitous presence of so many "eco-things": eco-products, eco-activism, eco-design, eco-philosophy, eco-consciousness, eco-culture, even eco-feminism, and finally – the eco-novel, which falls within the notions of "ecofiction", "environmental literature", "ecological literature", "nature writing" and "green writing".

The concept of "ecological consciousness" is a comparatively recent one. It gained momentum around the 1960s with the advent of modern environmental politics. It is customary to attribute the first springs of poetic environmental concerns to the Sentimentalists and Romanics: J.-J. Rousseau's, I. W. Goethe's and Lawrence Sterne's idyllic sentiments about the pleasures rustic life in nature can offer; William Wordsworth's famous "The World is too much with us…" raising the awareness of an industrialist advance; R. W. Emerson's and H. D. Thoreau's patriotic appeals to their fellow-citizens to turn towards the wisdom and self-sufficiency of the natural world. In a number of works of world literature, nature has also loomed as a monstrous character, an antagonist to human efforts to survive, with tempestuous weathers, disasters and hostility (consider William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Henry Melville's *Moby Dick*, as well as the novels of Jack London or Ernest Hemingway)  . All these are the foundational bricks for the much later 20th- and early 21st-century construction of ecological theories and philosophies. Ecological consciousness thus is a mode of perceiving, thinking and responding to nature.

While race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth-century literature, the situation seems to have changed in the first decades of the 21st century. A new genre form of the eco-novel is in the process of formation,

with some bright specimens in many literatures of the world already in place. Jim Dwyer writes: "Ecofiction is a composite subgenre made up of many styles, primarily modernism, postmodernism, realism, and magic realism, and can be found in many genres, primarily mainstream, westerns, mystery, romance, and speculative fiction" [15, p. 16]. Eco-novels promote a caring attitude to the environment, including such elements as depicting an actual physical contact with the non-human world, creating a heightened level of emotional response to it via a deeper form of empathy with the non-human.

Ecologically oriented authors use many literary forms: poetry, fiction, literary or philosophical essays. Some writers set ecofictional stories in natural landscapes to engage the reader with the environment described, they also make their characters establish a human relationship with these natural landscapes, trying to make them as "realistic" as possible. Back in the 20th century, we can think of J. R. R. Tolkien's mythology classics showing iconic battles of industrialization vs. nature, as well as books by science fiction authors – Ray Bradbury and Kurt Vonnegut – who were cautionary about the environment, or Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Michael McClure who represented the environmental consciousness of the Beat movement. Other important authors of the last century who raised these issues are John Steinbeck, Daphne du Maurier, Sarah Orne Jewett, H. H. Munro, J. G. Ballard, Isaac Asimov, William Saroyan, etc.

Contemporary ecological novels can be broken down into further sub-genres, such as eco-psychological, eco-feminist, eco-political, eco-social, etc. novels . Representative examples of ecological novels in English are collected in Jim Dwyer's book *Where the Wild Books Are* (2010), and the second decade of this century has added many more to the list. Colin Thubron's *To the Last City* (2002), Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010) and Magnus Macintyre's *Whirligig* (2013) are, perhaps, most prominent cases of British ecofiction, besides the Irishman Christopher Nolan's *The Banyan Tree* (2000) – a touching tale of a woman's attempts to continue living close to the earth and preserve traditional Celtic culture in changing times.

In contemporary American fiction, Richard Powers' novel *The Overstory* (2019) traces the lives of nine intersecting characters and their experiences with trees – a lyrical reminder of the interdependent relationship between humanity and nature. Leslie Marmon Silko (*Gardens in the Dunes*, 2000) touches upon the themes of nature in the context of Native American settings and scenes. N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy (*The Fifth Season*, 2015; *The Obelisk Gate*, 2016; *The Stone Sky*, 2017) asks some questions about how we should live in a climate-changed world where humanity is threatened by the man-made environmental crisis. Magic realism, when appealing to the mysterious in nature, can present the readers with a different perspective on nature. Such are the novels by Ursula K. Le Guin (*Gifts*, 2004; *Powers*, 2007). Ron Rash in his 2008 novel *Serena* describes the creation of a nature reserve in North Carolina and the struggle of the timber business against it.

The Canadian **Margaret Atwood**'s *MaddAddam* trilogy (*Oryx and Crake*, 2003; *The Year of the Flood*, 2009; *MaddAddam*, 2013) imaginatively engages with the consequences of hypercapitalism and genetic engineering. Thomas Wharton's fantasy and historical fiction in *The Salamander* (2001) and Mary Lawson's family saga *Crow Lake* (2002) also pay their tribute to environmental issues.

In Australia, Richard Flanagan's *Death of a River Guide* (2001), *Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish* (2001), Jane Alison's *Natives and Exotics* (2006), Dal Stivens' *A Horse of Air* (2008) are versatile and rich explorations of life in nature and human relationship with its treasures. *Tourmaline* (2002) by Randolph Stow takes place after a nuclear holocaust, Julie Leigh's *The Hunter* (2000) centres around the search for a mysterious, supposedly extinct wolflike creature known as the Tasmanian tiger; Roger McDonald has written *The Ballad of Desmond Kale* (2005), which explores the early years of the sheep industry.

In critical reviews, the novel ***Sitting with the Enemy: A novel of hope and transformation*** (2007) by **Sarah Ann Edwards**, a contemporary American writer, is designated as an ecopsychological novel. An attractive world of self-knowledge and self-improvement is created here thanks to nature. The two characters, Mark and Rose, live, like many others, in constant tension, in a civilizational pursuit of success and money. As a result, they achieve all the desired goals, acquire material wealth and lead a life in glamorous surroundings. However, all this turns out to be immersed in spiritual emptiness, the meaning of life seems to have been lost. The heroes lose their ability to see magic in life, and soon they almost lose each other as well. However, a sudden turn in their destiny leads them to an abandoned mountain village, where they find themselves in a community of people who are fighting to preserve their idyllic way of life. Mark and Rose are so attracted by wildlife that they acquire a new sense of the beauty of the life which is opening up to them. Through unity with the natural environment, a wonderful transformation takes place and as a result, answers appear to exciting questions about the place and purpose of a person on earth: if you find yourself driven into an endless crazy mode of life 24/7/365, you just need to escape from all this noise and din in order to finally understand what you really lack and how to act. And then Nature enters into you like a regulator. It attracts us and keeps us balanced both physically and emotionally.

The modern English writer **Colin Thubron** in his novel ***To the Last City*** (2004) sets up an experiment with the consciousness of a modern European who finds himself face to face with the wild and mighty nature of Peru, on the lands of the Incas. Only a close contact with nature gives travellers valuable knowledge about life and themselves. In this work, nature and the attitude towards it can be viewed as a specific attribute of a national character, which largely depends on the climate of the country of origin. In the mountains of Peru, for example, each of the Europeans notes the features of the landscape that can be found in his or her homeland; in the process of comparison and analysis, new things emerge, sometimes unexpected

insights in understanding personal identity and psychology. Particularly symbolic is the example of a Spanish monk, a descendant of the Conquistadors, who was busy all his life thinking about his guilt before the nation which had been almost completely destroyed by his ancestors. But then, under the powerful influence of the magic of nature, Francisco whispers a prayer of repentance, then forgiveness. And at that very minute he suddenly realizes the cause of self-inflicted pain. Representatives from different countries are brought together in the novel to understand the need to re-establish the lost spiritual unity with nature.

Ecocritics believe that the kind of stories we tell about our relationships with the nonhuman environment shape the way we prepare, respond to and recover from different forms of eco-catastrophes. If climate change is to be dealt with effectively, its popular perception must first be addressed at the level of imagination. Human involvements in climate crises and other environmental disasters are better perceived not through data and statistics, but through a lived experience, narrative testimonies of fact and fiction alike. The American ecocritic Lawrence Buell writes: "For technological breakthroughs, legislative reforms, and paper covenants about environmental welfare to take effect, or even to be generated in the first place, requires a climate of transformed environmental values, perception and will. To that end, the power of story, image and the artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics and cultural theory are critical" [11, p. vi].

Work further

- Give your own opinion about the development of ecofiction. Which specific novels mentioned in the subsection appeal to you most and why?
- Which environmental problems have been tackled by the eco-novel, and which have not?
- Are there cases in reality proving the power of the word to address and cure environmental problems?

Read the excerpts from the novel *Whirligig* by Magnus Macintyre and discuss the ways in which the conflict between culture and nature is re-enacted. How does the writer draw public attention to the issues of climate change and develop awareness of it, as well as our responsibility for our treatment of nature?

a) "Breakfast arrived and Claypole drilled into his meal like a starved hummingbird while Coky extolled the benefits of wind power between mouthfuls of Eggs Florentine.

'I mean it's clean, it's renewable. And the wind is free, so … what's not to like? And some people say they actively like the look of them. Beaty is in the eye of the beholder, and all that. And anyway, we really don't have much choice if we're going to reduce carbon emissions, right?'"

b) "'No. No, no. Yes, yes, yes. Yes.'

'Mm,' she said, 'You said you'd like to do a bit of … saving the planet.'

'Saving the planet?' Claypole was incredulous. He took out his recycling, bought organic food when it was available and didn't fill the kettle for one cup of tea, but he was preparing for imminent climate change by doing precisely what the majority of people were doing: getting on with his life.

'Yeah. Wind farming is a Good Thing, right? Capital "G", capital "T"? You said you'd been wasting your time doing kid's TV, and … this wind farm is something that you and me can actually do to make a difference. To the big picture.'"

c) "There is a theory that if a person walks through a forest, they are bound to find the one thing in that forest that is not forest. It is not, the theory goes, a coincidence. It is a rule of forests. Or rather, it is because it is in the nature of people. Human instinct is the same now as it was 4,000 years ago. Dwellings and other things important to people are found in hollows, by rivers, or at sites where a well can be dug, with ease, or at points where the visibility is best. So when you are walking through a forest, you will find the old burial sites, and the houses, the places where houses used to be, or where people used to look out for their sheep, or kept watch for Vikings. Just so long, that is, as you're not really looking for them. If you were to use a map, or have any kind of plan, you might well go wrong. The modern will is more powerful that the ancient instinct, and in any case this principle has been a little confused since people have started to build houses where they shouldn't be: on the sides of hills with no water, on flood plains and so on. Deliberately testing the boundaries of technology and ingenuity, perhaps – but in the last fifty years more from lack of space or the desire for profit. If this theory is to be believed, then, it was a good thing for him that almost nothing was going through Claypole's head as he wandered through the Garvach forest."

d) "Then he saw a house. At first heavily obscured by trees, as he quickened his pace he could see that it was whitewashed save for the black door, and that the Virginia creeper growing up it was huge but neat. The bowling roof was slated long ago but there were none missing, and as he got closer he saw that the house had two sash windows downstairs, either side of the door, and three upstairs, all with four panes of old and wobbly glass. It was a child's drawing of a cottage. He tripped uncomfortably down a bank and onto a road by the side of the house, hoping to find an entrance. Some sort of path up to the door, or a fence to guide you there. But there seemed to be none. All there was was a garden. And what a garden. Vast swathes of untidy but clearly very productive vegetable patch was how he might have described it at first. But as he got closer he could see that the vegetables were not all vegetables. There were herbs and weeds and bushes too, all jumbled in with what looked like a thousand varieties of fruit and vegetables. Raspberries climbed over peas which

stood over potatoes. Honeysuckle was trying to throttle a pear tree, which was partly shading a small patch of damp, shiny lettuces, untidily distributed between carrots and garlic. Great fat beetles nestled on the patches of wild flowers, reeds and grasses that towered unmown between these small oases of food, and bees hummed all around as Claypole stood marvelling. A hen clucked from beneath a juniper hedge, and Claypole jumped as he realized that he was just ten feet away from a pair of heavily breathing and watchful pigs, the other side of a wicker fence. It was as if the BBC had come in and spent a fortune on setting it all up for the biggest and baddest Jane Austen yet. It was perfectly pretty, gloriously ancient, and surely impossible.

…

'My word, yes.' She leaned back in her chair. 'Look, most people do a weekly shop for food, right? They come back from a soul-pilfering supermarket exhausted and irritated, and an awful lot poorer, with fifty plastic bags of over-engineered rubbish in vast amounts of packaging, and the whole thing has taken three hours and however many litres of petrol. I spend not more than two hours a week sorting out my food, not more than twenty yards from my back door. Keeps me fit, it's fun, and it … connects me with my plate.'

Claypole stiffened with doubt.

'That sounds a bit ripe to you? Well, let me tell you, you have no idea of the joy and fun involved in eating a tomato when you've reared it yourself from a pup.'

'I wouldn't know,' – said Claypole.

'It's not just food – it's like a cosmic swallow of one's own effort. It's laughing at Time.' She was stabbing the air as Johann Sebastian stuck his spurs into the orchestra to giddy them up a bit. '"Yah!" you say. "I got you back!" For the moment, as I chew on this carrot, I defy the cosmic forces and I laugh at Death. I have ingested my own labour. I haven't exploited or inconvenienced anyone, I haven't had to give any of it away in taxes, or paid any heed to the Man. It's mine.'

Claypole watched as she refilled both of their glasses.

'I know I'm a mad old goat, but it comes down to this …'

She paused, sipping gently. He watched her lips, as his mind drifted.

'The environment is complicated. It's complicated and it's very messy. But if you care, you have to get involved. Like you're about to do.' She pointed at Claypole's chest/ 'You can't live in a city and hope everything's going to be OK. you have to go to the countryside, get busy and make yourself part of it. There is no such thing as the environment. There's just parts of it.'"

The following excerpt from Ian McEwan's *Solar* alerts us to different opinions about climate change. Read and decide whose side you take.

Beard was not wholly skeptical about climate change. It was one in a list of issues, of looming sorrows, that made up the background to the news, and he read about it, vaguely deplored it, and expected governments to meet and take action. And of course he knew that a molecule of carbon dioxide absorbed energy in the infrared range, and that humankind was putting those molecules into the atmosphere in significant quantities. But he himself had other things to think about. And he was unimpressed by some of the wild commentary that suggested the world was in peril, that humankind was drifting toward calamity, when coastal cities would disappear under the waves, crops fail and hundreds of millions of refugees surge from one country, one continent, to another, driven by drought, floods, famine, tempests, unceasing wards for diminishing resources. There was an Old Testament ring to the forewarning, an air of plague-of-boils and deluge-of-frogs, that suggested a deep and constant inclination, enacted over the centuries a deep and constant inclination, enacted, over the centuries, to believe that one was always living at the end of days, that one's own demise was urgently bound up with the end of the world and therefore made more sense, or was just a little less irrelevant. The end of the world was never pitched in the present, where it could be seen for the fantasy it was, but just around the corner, and when it did not happen, a new issue, a new date, would soon when it did not happen, a new issue, a new date, would soon emerge. The old world purified by incendiary violence, washed cleaned by the blood of the unsaved – that was how it had been for Christian millennial sects: death to the unbelievers! And for Soviet Communists: death to the kulaks! And for Nazis and their thousand-year fantasy: death to the Jews! And then the truly democratic contemporary equivalent, an all-out nuclear war: death to everyone! When that did not happen, and after the Soviet empire had been devoured by its internal contradictions, and in the absence of any other overwhelming concern beyond boring, intransigent global poverty, the apocalyptic tendency had conjured yet another beast.

But Beard was always on the lookout for an official role with a stipend attached. A couple of long-running sinecures had recently come to an end, and his university salary, lecture fees, and media appearances were never quite sufficient. Fortunately, by the end of the century, the Blair government wished to be, or appear to be, practically rather than merely rhetorical engaged with climate change and announced a number of initiatives, one of which was the Center, a facility for the basic research in need of a mortal at its head sprinkled with Stockholm's magic dust. At the political level, a new minister had been appointed, an ambitious Mancunian with a populist's touch, proud of his city's industrial past, who told a press conference that he would "tap the genius" of the British people by inviting them to submit their own clean-energy ideas and drawings. In front of the cameras he promised that every submission would be answered. Braby's team – half a dozen underpaid postdoctoral physicists housed in four temporary cabins in a sea of mud – received hundreds of proposals within six weeks. Most were from lonely types working out of garden sheds, a few from start-up companies with zippy logos and "patents pending."

Write a short paper with five reasons why fiction can alter our attitude to the environment and influence the measures taken at the level of world governments to save the planet.

Test yourself:

1. Make a list of environmental issues in the 21st century.
2. What is an eco-novel? Give definitions of its subgenres.
3. Name all the eco-novels you remember and recollect what ecological issues they highlight.

1.8. The crossover novel

The contemporary literary process is a complex and dynamic system, where genres and genre forms are no longer "pure". One of such forms is the crossover novel, much loved and popular among readers. The broad meaning of the term is "crossing the borders". In the specific literary sense, the crossover novel means a work of fiction that appeals to a broad category of adults, children, teenagers and youth. In other words, crossover novels make an invisible path between a young and a mature reader, captivating them both in equal measure, letting each of them find in the text something corresponding to their age, mental outlook, topical problems of personality development, hidden senses or intertextual references to familiar cultural phenomena. There are synonymous terms for the notion of the crossover novel: young adult fiction (YA) – a narrower, but not very precise definition, and the novel of maturing / coming of age / adolescence novel – a type of Bildungsroman.

The nomination for the crossover novel as a separate, self-sufficient genre emerged only in the 21st century. As Sandra L. Beckett notes, "crossover literature is generally seen as a new trend, even as an invention of the twenty-first century. *Harry Potter* is considered *the crossover* title, a kind of prototype for the genre" [4, c. 58].

Joanne Rowling enjoyed overwhelming success, and it encouraged a lot of writers to create novels with the potential to reach out to both young and adult readers. The novels of this genre started to receive prestigious awards, such as the Whitbread, Alex Book Awards and Booker. These novels are among the most frequently screened.

The basic component of the crossover novel is the development of the character's personality during the most critical and unstable period of their life – between the ages of 11 and 19. According to psychological data, it is during this time that the personality parameters are set up, the core of the character is formed – those facets that are going to dominate throughout a person's life.

The transformation of the Bildungsroman into the more contemporary coming-of-age novel (variety of the crossover novel) can be traced in world literature starting from classical examples. The first masterpieces of the Bildungsroman, such as *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–96) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe were focused on the formation of a young man's outlook and values, but James Joyce transformed the genre conventions in his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), not just turning to a young person in the formative years of their youth, but to the "inner self" of that person, making use of such techniques as epiphany, vortex, and stream-of-consciousness . In-between those novels, there is Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Pendennis* (1848–1850) and *The Newcomes* (1855) by William Makepeace Thackeray. These novels already demonstrated some of the qualities of the contemporary crossover novel: though they were not initially oriented towards a teenager, but rather demanded the experience of a mature adult reader, still, a young adult was envisaged as a potential reader. The Bildungsroman follows a certain scheme in its plot structure, a kind of quest archetype: a young man leaves his childhood behind, often comes into conflict with the provincial morals of his family circle, because neither his parents not his school recognize his artistic, creative, restless and ambitious nature; then he manages to free himself from conventional limitations – and loses his innocence, becomes even more disillusioned, undergoes a trial by love and searches for his true vocation and life philosophy, which can be implemented in reality. It is the very processes leading to such an outcome that is significant.

The crossover novel has a bit different type of plot architectonics. In a broader context, there is a double-layer principle: such a novel has an external plane of reference – the problem of a teenager, and a more complex, implicative plane, accessible to a more mature consciousness. In the novels of the 21st century, such a plane is increasingly saturated with socio-political content, sexual, racial, religious, environmental and other issues.

The history of the crossover novel in English-language prose, according to many researchers, begins not with *Harry Potter*, but with such novels of the 19th century as *The Water-Babies* (1863) by Charles Kingsley, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll and *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) by George MacDonald. Although targeted at young audiences, these novels were recognized in Victorian culture as serious adult novels. In the twentieth century, the crossover phenomenon crystallized in the novels *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5) by John Ronald Ruel Tolkien and *Watership Down* (1972) by Richard Adams. The closest prototypes of the new crossover form, preceding *Harry Potter*, were the novels *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by Jerome David Salinger, *Lord of the Flies* (1954) by William Golding and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee. J. K. Rowling's septology about Harry Potter (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997); *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, 1998; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999); *Harry Potter and*

the Goblet of Fire (2000); *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003); *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* (2005); *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) was followed by the popular series of novels *Twilight* (2005-2008) and *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010) by American writers Stephenie Meyer and Susan Collins, respectively. In parallel with the novels of J. K. Rowling, Philip Pullman's fantastic trilogy *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000) was released.

By the end of the twentieth century, and in the first decades of the twenty-first century, instead of the defining motif of the novel of upbringing – spiritual growth through a conflict with the environment, where the narration was conducted on behalf of an eighteen- or twenty-year-old student or a specialist at the dawn of their career, in the crossover novel, the character, as a rule, is in the process of experiencing their psychological crisis; he/she tells about events as they happen, and the "spiritual search" is not at all the beacon that directs the movement of their consciousness, he/she is solving the problems of mental trauma here and now. He/she balances between two worlds: coming out of childhood, but not yet attaining maturity. The deeper sense of one's life experience, the secrets of one's own consciousness and subconsciousness, traumatic and sexual – this is the texture of this essentially psychological subgenre. Lilia Khabibullina writes that the peculiarity of "youth" prose is that the author usually "does not have the opportunity to psychologically identify himself with the hero" [42, p. 416]. The reason for this is the age distance between the author and the hero-narrator.

The contemporary teenage hero's worldview becomes more complex in each subsequent novel. **J. K. Rowling** puzzles both her hero and the reader with questions about the limits of modesty and patience, about the fight against injustice, about the value of friendship and knowledge, about tolerance towards others, as well as more philosophical problems of life and death. Over time, the crossover novel begins to ask questions of identity in an age of total reassessment of values, when the concepts of "man" and "nature" cease to serve as the fundamental units of measurement of our existence, when the "scanner" type of thinking dominates in the modern culture, and discoveries in medicine, biogenetics, nanotechnology push off the humanities to the background, when the ecological environment becomes totally dependent on the technogenic world, and everyday life is filled with various visual and sound forms and sophisticated kinds of violence.

Against the backdrop of modern-day Pandemonium, **Nick Hornby**'s novel ***About a Boy*** (1998) returned the good old tradition of humour to English literature. The 1990s with pop and youth subcultures, the crisis of single mothers, the bullying and the social problems of a London teenager are discussed in the novel with a good-hearted humour. The greatest success among readers, long before the publication of Hornby's novel, was the first novel in a series of 9 books by Sue Townsend, *The Diaries of Adrian Mole* (1982–2009) – *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 3/4*, 1982). The work reflects the naivety of the interpretation of the external world by a teenager.

Questions like "Who am I?", "Am I good or bad?", "What will I become?", "If there is no God, is there good and evil?" are the main problems of the novel *Clay* (2005) by David Almond. What is a computer virus capable of? – we ask a question while reading the novel *Hybrids* (2006) by David Thorpe, and we get an answer from which a chill runs through the skin: "glued" to the screen of a computer or a phone, we may become infected with a machine virus and be reborn into a car. The heroes of the *Twilight* series (2006) by Stephenie Meyer are the characters in the vampire chronicles, behind which hides a far too serious, not at all childish question: Is death the end of everything? The same non-childish question – What gender am I? – worries the heroine of the novel *What I Was* (2007), Meg Rosoff. The adventures of adolescents in school, the complex formation of a personality in the microsociety are the "youth" layer of crossover novels, while "adult", serious and life-defining problems lie at the heart of the complex psychological novel *Before I Die* (2007) by Jenny Downham, a novel in which death from leukaemia is neither romantic nor heroic, but rather too real. *Black Swan Green* (2006) by David Mitchell and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon are the most featured masterpieces of crossover literature. They are concentrated on the most difficult thing in the formation of identity – on its multiple options: What kind of "I" should I choose to be able to function in a society?

The hybridity of these works presupposes the discourse and problematics that correspond to the minds of 11–19-year-old readers, in contrast to the "macabre" texts about adolescent experience, which rests entirely on the point of view of a mature outlook, despite the youthful voice of the narrator. Such novels include, for example, *The Cement Garden* (1978) by Ian McEwan and *Boyhood* (1997) by John Maxwell Coetzee.

Rachel Falconer notes the serious problem of identity formation in the process of experiencing psychological trauma as the central issue of the modern crossover novel. However, according to the researcher, it is incorrect to reduce everything to a traumatic experience, and he gives a long list of "light", "fun" literature for boys and girls (chick-lit and lad-lit) [16, p. 89], including *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (1999) by Louise Rennison, *Alpha Force* (2002–2005) by Chris Ryan and many others.

Nevertheless, more and more often it is argued that "youth" literature in general has become much more problematic, "dark", morally ambiguous than it was a few decades ago, the themes of "violence, death and the apocalypse have become the norm rather than the exception" [16, p. 89]. Torture and murder are described in alarmingly subtle detail in Liane Hearn's Oriental fantasy series *Tales of the Otori* (2002–7). And racial violence and terrorism dominate Malorie Blackman's dystopia trilogy *Noughts & Crosses* (2001). The fantasy novels *The Book Thief* (2005) by Markus Zuzak and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) by John Boyne describe the experience of the Holocaust.

Mark Haddon's novel ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*** is a humanistic act of artistic empathy, an appeal to consciousness of a "different order" (the main character and narrator of the novel is Christopher Boone, who suffers from Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism). The author erases the binary opposition between the stereotypical notions of the normal and the abnormal, and portrays an amazing, original content of the inner world of a person who can still become a member of society, learn to understand the feelings of others and contribute to the humanization of people in the 21st century who forget that they have souls. The novel is experimental: drawings and graphics, maps, photographs and math problems are woven into the text. These visual effects depict a marginal psychology, which is inaccessible to scientific medical intervention, as accurately as possible.

Black Swan Green by **David Mitchell** tells the story of one year in the life of a thirteen-year-old boy Jason Taylor who lives in a village in Worcestershire. The novel has 13 episodes narrated by Jason – according to the number of years of the protagonist. It is a story about his daily adventures and experiences against the background of family discord and difficult relationships with peers at school. Jason has a bright imagination and writes poetry. He stutters and therefore becomes a constant target of ridicule and bullying. At the deepest level of the novel, the issues of the divorce of parents and class consciousness are traced, which allows the reader to form an understanding of their place in society during Thatcherism. (💬 2.11.)

The popularity the crossover genre is impressive, dozens of new books appear every year, expanding the potential of fiction to reach out to the minds of our contemporaries.

Work further

- Which crossover novels listed in the subsection are familiar to you?
- Explain the "double-layer" in crossover novels. Can you break down the problematics of this subgenre into that of the adult and teenage worlds?
- Outline the evolution of the crossover novel. Are there are any examples you can add to the list?

🔍 Read the excerpt from the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the night-Time* and discuss the ways in which the boy's consciousness perceives the world.

I find people confusing.

This is for two main reasons.

The first main reason is that people do a lot of talking without using any words. Siobhan says that if you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things. It can mean "I want to do sex with you" and it can also mean "I think that what you just said was very stupid."

Siobhan also says that if you close your mouth and breathe out loudly through your nose, it can mean that you are relaxed, or that you are bored, or that you are angry, and it all depends on how much air comes out of your nose and how fast and what shape your mouth is when you do it and how you are sitting and what you said just before and hundreds of other things which are too complicated to work out in a few seconds.

The second main reason is that people often talk using metaphors. These are examples of metaphors.

I laughed my socks off.

He was the apple of her eye.

They had a skeleton in the cupboard.

We had a real pig of a day.

The dog was stone dead.

The word metaphor means carrying something from one place to another, and it comes from the Greek words meta (which means from one place to another) and ferein (which means to carry), and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn't. This means that the word metaphor is a metaphor.

I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards. And when I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone's eye doesn't have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about.

My name is a metaphor. It means carrying Christ and it comes from the Greek words χρίστοζ (which means Jesus Christ) and φερείν and it was the name given to St. Christopher because he carried Jesus Christ across a river.

This makes you wonder what he was called before he carried Christ across the river. But he wasn't called anything because this is an apocryphal story, which means that it is a lie, too.

Mother used to say that it meant Christopher was a nice name because it was a story about being kind and helpful, but I do not want my name to mean a story about being kind and helpful. I want my name to mean me.

Write a short paper about one of your favourite novels belonging to the subgenre of crossover (Young Adult) fiction.

Test yourself:

1. Which of the novels mentioned depict school experience?
2. Which of the novels mentioned raise the problem of bullying?
3. In which of the novels mentioned do we encounter the elements of the "macabre"?
4. Which of the crossover novels have the identity crisis motif?

1.9. Multiculturalism now

The 20th century saw an unprecedented rise in the creativity of authors from former British colonies and migrant writers in the USA and other countries. Authors born and raised in former colonies began very actively to publish novels in English and receive literary prizes. This phenomenon is known as multiculturalism. To return to a more comprehensive definition, multiculturalism in literature is the existence, acceptance, and/or promotion of multiple cultural traditions; it includes works of persons of distinctive ethnic groups, oriented around issues of race and/or ethnicity. Very often postcolonial writing is organically included into multicultural literature. However, one distinction should be made: postcolonial literature is produced by post-colonial writers living in British ex-colonies or Britain (or other countries) who were born and bred in colonized countries; this literature deals with post-colonial topics.

Some writers who became prominent in the 20th century have also published new works in the 2000s. The names of these novelists stand out in particular: Doris Lessing (1919–2013; South Africa/UK), Nadine Gordimer (1923–2014; South Africa), Chinua Achebe (1930–2013; Nigeria), V. S. Naipaul (born 1932; Trinidad), J. M. Coetzee (born 1940; South Africa, Australia), Michael Ondaatje (born 1943; Sri Lanka and Canada); Peter Carey (born 1943; Australia); Salman Rushdie (born 1947; India, Pakistan, US, and UK); Charles Mungoshi (born 1947; Zimbabwe) Jamaica Kincaid (born 1947; Antigua), Timothy Mo (born 1950; Hong Kong/UK); Kazuo Ishiguro (born 1951; UK/Japan); Hanif Kureishi (born 1954; UK/Pakistan), Caryl Phillips (born 1958; Caribbean), Ben Okri (1959; Nigeria/UK), Arundati Roy (born 1961; India), Zadie Smith (born 1975; UK). There are also new names that have become known in the 21st century: Aravind Adiga (born 1974; India), Andrea Levy (1956–2019; UK, Jamaican parents); Hari Kunzru (born 1969; India/UK), Amit Chaudhuri (born 1962; India).

In the USA, the country that gave birth to the multicultural trends and traditions in literature, authors who have been the flagships of cultural diversity, are Saul Bellow (1915–2005), Philip Roth (1933–2018), Toni Morrison (1931–2019), Alice Walker (born 1944), Gloria Naylor (1950–2016), Leslie Marmon Silko (born 1948), Sandra Cisneros (born 1954), Maxine Hong Kingston (born 1940), Sherman Alexie (born 1966), Louise Erdrich (born 1954) and many others.

Critics have noticed visible differences between the thematic range of the 20th-century multicultural fiction and that of the new epoch. As more and more ethnic and marginalized voices have been heard and accepted, as the traumatic colonial past has been revisited and re-lived through novels, the 21st century creates quite new and distinct subjects within the tradition of multiculturalist writing. Not giving up on certain historically significant concerns, such British writers

as Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith. Hanif Kureishi, Andrea Levy, Monica Ali "…depict an 'in-between' experience and viewpoint in their novels, aware of the changes needed to be wrought on traditional idea of British identify in order to include the migrant's experience and also recognize the new British ethnic mix brought about by the post-war diaspora" [12, p. 21].

American multicultural novels speak of their dissimilarity by raising topographically, politically and historically different issues. Thus, in ***The Kite Runner*** (2003) by the Afghan-American author **Khaled Hosseini**, the main character and the narrator spent his childhood in Afghanistan, and when he comes to America, the violence of his past continues to haunt him. Back in Afghanistan, he again witnesses the fundamentalist brutality of the Taliban. The author puts onto the surface the inhumane reality of the persecuted ethnic groups. Ultimately, the narrator struggles to reconcile his two identities – as an Afghani and an American.

The Indian author Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), contrary to the general optimister message of *The Kite Runner*, describes an entirely negative immigrant experience in America.

Native American issues have come to the foreground, drawing public attention to the gruesome past. An entire trend has been established, represented by such eminent novelists as Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, N. Scott Momaday, Sherman Joseph Alexie Jr. and others. "Native American Renaissance" took place in the 1960s and many themes continue into the 21st century, such as ritual and tradition, the reservation experience and identity. **Louise Erdrich**'s novel ***The Night Watchman*** (2020) explores the issues of identity, community, love of nature, relationship with animals and even magic. (💬 2.19.)

The authors who are facing the new millennium often have an "aesthetic supermarket" at their disposal, where they can choose from diverse options available from their predecessors. However, the issues of post-colonialism, race and ethnicity have acquired new challenges and meanings. The literature that positioned itself as post-colonial in the 20th century has gradually turned away from the damnatory-traumatic tonality towards a new procreative, redefining optimism. Such, for the most part, is Zadie Smith's novelistic mood, especially in *White Teeth* (2000).

The early days of 2001 saw quite an exalted mood in recognition of the achievement of the 20th-century efforts of tolerating, accepting and spreading the concepts of different cultures. Robin Cook's so-called "chicken tikka masala" speech 📞 proves this point: "We should be proud that those British values have made Britain a successful multi-ethnic society. We should welcome that pluralism as a unique asset for Britain in a modern world where our prosperity, our security and our influence depend on the health of our relations with other peoples around the globe.

Tolerance is important, but it is not enough. We should celebrate the enormous contribution of the many communities in Britain to strengthening our economy, to supporting our public services, and to enriching our culture and cuisine. And we should recognise that its diversity is part of the reason why Britain is a great place to live" [13] 🔊. However, the rise of international terrorism only a few months later washed off the celebratory mood.

There is another side to the political aspect of multicultural programmes, which was voiced in 2011 by the then Prime Minister David Cameron: "Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values. So, when a white person holds objectionable views, racist views for instance, we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious frankly – frankly, even fearful – to stand up to them" [29] 🔊.

This and a lot of other quite ardent and convincing pronouncements are at odds with the demographic fact of multicultural diversity (about 13 per cent of population in Britain).

Many critics today notice one discernible tendency in recent British multicultural literature: the focus on cultural conflicts that have rather violent manifestations. For example, in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*, a young Islamist feels nostalgic about the Bengali culture, and so he becomes involved with a Bangladeshi woman. Novels often focus on the characters' strict adherence to their native cultures, which are in many ways contrasted to the culture of the receiving community. Sometimes, this adherence takes radical forms, like in Sunjeev Sahota's novel *Ours are the Streets* (2011), in which an Islamist terrorist bomber commits suicide. As the author shows a gradual radicalization of the protagonist, the novel taps into a series of episodes similar to those that appear in the short story "My Son the Fanatic" by Hanif Kureishi, or in the novel *A Week in December* by Sebastian Faulks.

Zadie Smith, already mentioned in the context of "hysterical realism" is a prominent voice in the British multicultural novel. In addition to exploring the migrants' culture and identity in the hosting British society in *White Teeth*, Muslim fundamentalism and other similarly fundamentalist belief systems, with religion interconnected with nationality, race, and class (💬 2.2.), in her novel *On Beauty* (2005) she depicts the a mixed-race British/American family living in the United States, addressing ethnic and cultural differences in both the USA and the UK. Though the novel takes place in a mostly white academic town in the US, ethnicity and the specific legacy of slavery and segregation are essential here.

Salman Rushdi's literary reputation has always rested on multiculturalism and postmodernist techniques. He wrote the first 21st-century multicultural novel *Shalimar the Clown* in 2005, making Srinagar (the largest city and the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, India) the setting. Shalimar is also the name of one of the characters, who performs a tightrope act for the amusement of the villagers. The novel portrays the paradise that once was Kashmir, and how the lives of people have changed as a result of drastic political events. *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) depicts a visit of a European to the Mughal emperor Akbar's court, moving the action between continents. *The Golden House* (2017) also experiments with settings, Mumbai and New York, thus bringing together, contrasting and juxtaposing different nations and cultures.

Hanif Kureishi's multicultural fiction, after the success of the 1990 novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, continues in the 21st century as well. Especially prominent is his novel ***Something to Tell You*** (2008). Jamal, an Indian-born psychoanalyst narrates an uneasy story about people and events from the 1970s, when Jamal was living a rackety bohemian life in London, in and out of the theatre world, pubs and beds. His confession is not only personal but societal; the flashbacks illuminate a now-vanished hedonistic world of sexual promiscuity, drugs and violent social reactions. Back in the present day, his feckless sister and his best friend persuade him to join a swinger's circuit. Equally, he likes the fact that London is now "one of the great Muslim cities". But his main concern is his relationship with his 12-year-old son Rafi. Whether Jamal's confession is cathartic or not, by its end he is ready to see his next lucrative patient.

Cultures generate values, and neither culture should pretend to objectively or universally judge another's practices – this is one of the important achievements of the multicultural thinking in the United States after centuries of various forms of segregation, discrimination and racism. The novel in the US in the 21st century can boast of triumph of literary multiculturalism: a comprehensive concept of culture replaced the obsolete notion of race. A culture is now regarded as something that endured over long periods of time; that had to be understood and evaluated holistically as encompassing language, religious beliefs, social practices, family organization, folklore, and so on; that was conservative insofar as it was resistant to rapid change; and that needed to be understood in its own relative terms and not against a putative universal Western civilization, which was in any case only another series of related cultures. There have been several stages of the multicultural literary development in the USA: 1) from the 1920s to 1940s, 2) 1940–1965, 3) and from that time onwards one can speak of a new cultural, not racial approach to writing. Multiculturalism frequently makes its historical reference to eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century

racial oppressions experienced by African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans. But the meaning of contemporary literary multiculturalism is determined not so much by those different histories as by treatment of these traditions as part of a unified field. Thus one can speak of a new cultural, not racial approach to writing.

The said field is so rich and diverse, that it appears almost impossible to outline even the most prominent multicultural novels of contemporary American authors. We shall point out just a few representatives of some most productive and visible cultural groups in contemporary USA. Thus, Tony Morrison's novels continue to represent African American literature from the 20th to the 21st century: *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), *God Help the Child* (2015).

Chicano literature can be represented by R. Anaya and S. Cisneros (*Caramelo, Or, Puro Cuento*, 2002) the books by. Native American literature develops very intensely and includes the books by N. Scott Momaday. The Indian American author Jhumpa Lahiri achieved success with her 2013 novel *The Lowland*. Bharati Mukherjee beautifully explored contrasting lives in India and North America in *Jasmine* (1989), *Desirable Daughters* (2002), and *The Tree Bride* (2004). Chinese American authors active in this century include Maxine Hong Kingston and Ami Tan. Jewish American literature enjoyed especial success due to Ph. Roth. The Bosnian immigrant Aleksandar Hemon wrote *The Question of Bruno* (2000) and *Nowhere Man* (2002) to add to the broad cultural diversity.

J. M. Coetzee represents a unique bulk of multicultural writing, concentrating on South African racial and social conflicts, especially evidenced in his Booker prize winning novel ***Disgrace*** (1999) (💬 2.1.). Like other multicultural novelistss today, he expands the range of topics incorporating broad social, political, ecological and psychological issues.

Work further

- How has the novel of multiculturalism changed from the 20th to the 21st century?
- Which authors continue their chosen topics – portraying lives of migrants, postcolonial subjects, intercultural and interracial communication and diversity?
- What new concepts do the multicultural novels tackle?

Read the excerpt from the novel *Small Island* by Andrea Levy and comment on the issue of racial prejudice.

Mr Bligh stepped back one stride, not in fear of Gilbert but only so he might better show his disdain by perusing him up and down. 'Why, in God's name, would Queenie think to entrust the baby's upbringing to people like you? That poor little half-caste child would be better off begging in a gutter!' he said.

Gilbert sucked on his teeth to return this man's scorn. 'You know what your trouble is, man?' he said. 'Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That is all, man. White. No better, no worse than me – just white.' Mr Bligh moved his eye to gaze on the ceiling. 'Listen to me, man, we both just finish fighting a war – a bloody war – for the better world we wan' see. And on the same side – you and me. We both look on other men to see enemy. You and me, fighting for empire, fighting for peace. But still, after all that we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not. Am I to be the servant and you are the master for all time? No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You no see? We must. Or else you just gonna fight me till the end?'

Gilbert had hushed the room. It was not only Mr Bligh whose mouth gaped in wonder. Even the baby had fallen silent. For at that moment as Gilbert stood, his chest panting with the passion from his words, I realised that Gilbert Joseph, my husband, was a man of class, a man of character, a man of intelligence. Noble in a way that would some day make him a legend. 'Gilbert Joseph,' everyone would shout. 'Have you heard about Gilbert Joseph?'

And Mr Bligh, blinking straight in Gilbert's eye once more, said softly, 'I'm sorry.' Of course, I thought, of course. Who would not be chastened by those fine words from my smart, handsome and noble husband? But this Englishman just carried on, 'I'm sorry . . . but I just can't understand a single word that you're saying.'

Gilbert's august expression slipped from his face to shatter into tiny pieces upon the floor. He leaned down to me and took the baby from my arms. Straightening himself he handed the bundled baby to Mr Bligh. He then took my hand in his and guided me silently from the room. (A. Levy. *Small Island*)

Write a short paper about one of the novels mentioned in the chapter. Concentrate on the issue of culture, diversity and national or ethnic identity.

Test yourself:

1. Make a list of all culture-specific novels you can find in this chapter.
2. Supplement the list of American multicultural novelists.
3. Fill in the following table:

Ethnic literature in English	**Famous novels of the 21st century**	**Themes and issues**
e.g. Afro-American	*A Mercy* (2008), by Tony Morrison	Slavery, Colonial America, mothers and daughters

Section 2. Discussing the authors and the texts

In this section, the readers are invited to take a closer look at a selection of excerpts from different 21st-century Anglophone novels (it will be of great use to read the novel for discussion beforehand). They are not strictly related to the trends and genres outlined in Section 1. Rather, these examples aim to open discussions, spur interest and promote further reading. The structure of each sub-section will follow this pattern:

1) read some essential author information and see what may be of use when discussing the novels;

2) read a brief plot summary of the novel you will discuss (or plan reading the complete text later on);

3) read carefully and thoroughly the selected excerpts from the novels and reflect on the questions that follow;

4) engage in a discussion of issues and topics raised in the novel (in case you have read the complete text).

2.1. John Maxwell Coetzee. *Disgrace* (1999)

John Maxwell Coetzee was born in 1940 into a family of Afrikaners, descendants of Dutch immigrants. After graduating from the Faculty of Mathematics at the University of Cape Town, he went to work in England and then moved to the United States, where he became a professor of literature. After 10 years in America, Coetzee returned home and began his career at the University of Cape Town. 20 years later, however, he left Africa again and moved to Australia, where he now lives and works. Wherever the writer is, his heart is in Africa, in the darkness of the souls of his characters. South Africa is the setting of most of his grim stories.

Coetzee boldly, with the determination of a researcher, delves into the abyss of life and follows the path of suffering of the heroes of his novels. His characters have been compared to Kafkaesque, semi-anonymous wanderers and eccentrics, to Beckett's clumsy poor people. And indeed, in almost each of his works, there is a poor man, against whom, it seems, the whole world turns. This incongruous martyr always runs away from someone, tries to fight injustice; silence is his weapon, non-resistance to evil by violence is a form of moral victory.

Coetzee's Man Booker Prize-winning novel *Disgrace* (1999) is about a middle-aged university professor, whose sexual exploits in the context of post-apartheid era and public fixation on harassment issues, bring him to complete

denigration and destruction. Colonialism and its legacies make up Coetzee's recognizable motif in the majority of his novels, starting from the debut book *Dusklands* (1974). The relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed also structures Coetzee's most powerful, albeit disturbing works: *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983).

Waiting for the Barbarians is the novel that seeks out the origins of the darkness called "totalitarianism", or the System. In some unnamed border area, omnipotent representatives of the Empire are protecting their land from an unknown enemy – barbarians, whom no one really saw, but about whom everyone speaks with caution, fearing their violent invasion and its devastating consequences. Neither place nor time is determined: the setting is in the boundless human space, where timelessness and the parable-like ubiquity reflect repression or total control, be it the Middle Ages or the Holocaust. The colonel, the villainous character, is engaged in "exposing" the invisible enemy. As he says, "…I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see – this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth". The "barbarians" appear to be the destitute, decrepit nomadic peasants who come to the city in search of wages, food or alms. They are caught, imprisoned, killed, maimed, raped… And then Coetzee focuses our attention on the mind of one character, the Magistrate, who first serves the System, but over time finds himself in the position of an "enemy", a traitor, and a spy.

If someone with an education, who was once powerful, can turn out an outcast, then Michael K. with a hare's lip (*Life and Times of Michael K.*) and his mother, both of whom are physically disabled, become innocent victims of big politics, the coup, curfew, people in military clothes, patrols and shots, pogroms and violence. In the midst of it all, is Michael's lonely figure, first with his exhausted mother in a homemade wheelchair, then with a box of her ashes. Without anger or resentment, resistance or struggle, Michael is not exactly that ridiculous Beckett hero, a poor man, a bum and a drunkard, philosophically absurd, but the one who still seeks freedom and opportunity to grow his garden.

Coetzee's novels *Foe* (1986) and *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (2003) are a tribute to the literary fashion of postmodernism. The former is a reinvented story of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, and the latter is described by David Lodge as a book "which begins like a cross between a campus novel and a Platonic dialogue, segues into introspective memoir and fanciful musing, and ends with a Kafkaesque bad dream of the afterlife". *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) is Coetzee's revisit of Dostoevsky's life and works.

Coetzee's "memoirs", *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth* (2002) are a combination of fiction and biography, fitting the genre, defined earlier in this book as fictional/fictionalized biography (autobiography) (1.3).

In his 21st-centruy novels, Coetzee seems to deepen his interest in the notion of character and the degree of their resemblance with the personality of the author himself. Such is the *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), and in some respect, the three "Jesus Christ" novels – *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016) and *The Death of Jesus* (2019). Coetzee's staple in the recent years has been to refuse from the straight division of works of fiction and non-fiction, preferring instead to work across categories and genres, which may generate ontological and epistemological questions for his readers.

Coetzee's most notable awards include several of the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the 1983 and 1999 Booker Prizes, as well as the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature.

The novel *Disgrace* demonstrates the flow of history and magnifies the issue of postcolonial traumatic consciousness. The central character, David Lurie, toes the line with his literary precursors – Michael K. and the Magistrate. A middle-aged, twice divorced Modern Languages professor occupies quite a high academic position teaching Romantic poetry at the Technical University of Cape Town to a group of uninterested students. He is an incorrigible womanizer, and his relationship with his own female student brings about a disaster, and a disgrace.

Discussion

1. Relate David Lurie's story from several perspectives: of his own; of his lover Soraya; of his student Melanie; of his daughter Lucie; of the Committee that investigates his case; of the residents near his daughter's farm.
2. Present the same story in the context of South African history of apartheid.
3. Present character profiles of the following personages (try to be as objective as possible):
   - David Lurie
   - Lucy
   - Malanie Isaacs
   - Petrus
   - Soraya
   - David's university colleagues
4. In one of the critical assessments of this book, it is stated that "in Lurie's fall from Romantics Professor to Professor of Communications we witness the wider reduction of art and language to the realm of the literal, the functional, the practical. Within this new world academics have become, as Lurie goes on to put it 'clerks in a post-religious age" [31]. Comment on this important issue which may also characterize the situation in academia in the 21st century.

5. Compare David's role as a professor and that of an animal clinic worker, where he euthanizes dogs.
6. Comment in the novel's violence scenes. Are there differences in the violence against David in Cape Town and on the farm?
7. Comment on the novel's title.
8. What role do various references to dogs play in the novel?
9. Does the author make any inferences as to the judgment about Lurie's actions? What is your attitude to what happens to David? Do you approve of his disgrace?
10. Does the author hit at the legacies in the post-colonial era?

In these episodes, David's "case" is presented. Comment on its complexity and evaluate the writer's not-straightforward language.

a) At four o'clock the next afternoon he is at her flat. She opens the door wearing a crumpled T-shirt, cycling shorts, slippers in the shape of comic-book gophers which he finds silly, tasteless.

He has given her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her. When he takes her in his arms, her limbs crumple like a marionette's. Words heavy as clubs thud into the delicate whorl of her ear. 'No, not now!' she says, struggling. 'My cousin will be back!'

But nothing will stop him. He carries her to the bedroom, brushes off the absurd slippers, kisses her feet, astonished by the feeling she evokes. Something to do with the apparition on the stage: the wig, the wiggling bottom, the crude talk. Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that.

She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes. She lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her: she even helps him, raising her arms and then her hips. Little shivers of cold run through her; as soon as she is bare, she slips under the quilted counterpane like a mole burrowing, and turns her back on him.

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away.

'Pauline will be back any minute,' she says when it is over. 'Please. You must go.'

He obeys, but then, when he reaches his car, is overtaken with such dejection, such dullness, that he sits slumped at the wheel unable to move.

A mistake, a huge mistake. At this moment, he has no doubt, she, Melanie, is trying to cleanse herself of it, of him. He sees her running a bath, stepping into the water, eyes closed like a sleepwalker's. He would like to slide into a bath of his own.

66 99 b) That is how it begins. Next morning, with surprising dispatch, a memorandum arrives from the office of the Vice-Rector (Student Affairs) notifying him that a complaint has been lodged against him under article 3.1 of the university's Code of Conduct. He is requested to contact the Vice-Rector's office at his earliest convenience.

The notification – which arrives in an envelope marked Confidential – is accompanied by a copy of the code. Article 3 deals with victimization or harassment on grounds of race, ethnic group, religion, gender, sexual preference, or physical disability. Article 3.1 addresses victimization or harassment of students by teachers.

A second document describes the constitution and competences of committees of inquiry. He reads it, his heart hammering unpleasantly. Halfway through, his concentration fails. He gets up, locks the door of his office, and sits with the paper in his hand, trying to imagine what has happened.

Melanie would not have taken such a step by herself, he is convinced. She is too innocent for that, too ignorant of her power. He, the little man in the ill-fitting suit, must be behind it, he and cousin Pauline, the plain one, the duenna. They must have talked her into it, worn her down, then in the end marched her to the administration offices.

'We want to lodge a complaint,' they must have said.

'Lodge a complaint? What kind of complaint?'

'It's private.'

'Harassment,' cousin Pauline would have interjected, while Melanie stood by abashed – 'against a professor.'

'Go to room such-and-such.'

In room such-and-such he, Isaacs, would grow bolder. 'We want to lay a complaint against one of your professors.'

'Have you thought it through? Is this really what you want to do?' they would respond, following procedure.

'Yes, we know what we want to do,' he would say, glancing at his daughter, daring her to object.

There is a form to fill in. The form is placed before them, and a pen. A hand takes up the pen, a hand he has kissed, a hand he knows intimately. First the name of the plaintiff: MELANIE ISAACS, in careful block letters. Down the column of boxes wavers the hand, searching for the one to tick. There, points the nicotine-stained finger of her father. The hand slows, settles, makes its X, its cross of righteousness:

J'accuse. Then a space for the name of the accused. DAVID LURIE, writes the hand: PROFESSOR. Finally, at the foot of the page, the date and her signature: the arabesque of the M, the l with its bold upper loop, the downward gash of the I, the flourish of the finals.

The deed is done. Two names on the page, his and hers, side by side. Two in a bed, lovers no longer but foes.

He calls the Vice-Rector's office and is given a five o'clock appointment, outside regular hours.

At five o'clock he is waiting in the corridor. Aram Hakim, sleek and youthful, emerges and ushers him in. There are already two persons in the room: Elaine Winter, chair of his department, and Farodia Rassool from Social Sciences, who chairs the university-wide committee on discrimination.

'It's late, David, we know why we are here,' says Hakim, 'so let's get to the point. How can we best tackle this business?'

'You can fill me in about the complaint.'

'Very well. We are talking about a complaint laid by Ms Melanie Isaacs. Also about' – he glances at Elaine Winter – 'some pre-existing irregularities that seem to involve Ms Isaacs. Elaine?'

Elaine Winter takes her cue. She has never liked him; she regards him as a hangover from the past, the sooner cleared away the better. 'There is a query about Ms Isaacs's attendance, David. According to her – I spoke to her on the phone – she has attended only two classes in the past month. If that is true, it should have been reported. She also says she missed the mid-term test. Yet' – she glances at the file in front of her – 'according to your records, her attendance is unblemished and she has a mark of seventy for the mid-term.' She regards him quizzically. 'So unless there are two Melanie Isaacs . . .'

'There is only one,' he says. 'I have no defence.'

Smoothly Hakim intervenes. 'Friends, this is not the time or place to go into substantial issues. What we should do' – he glances at the other two – 'is clarify procedure. I need barely say, David, the matter will be handled in the strictest confidence, I can assure you of that. Your name will be protected, Ms Isaacs's name will be protected too. A committee will be set up. Its function will be to determine whether there are grounds for disciplinary measures. You or your legal representative will have an opportunity to challenge its composition. Its hearings will be held in camera. In the meantime, until the committee has made its recommendation to the Rector and the Rector has acted, everything goes on as before. Ms Isaacs has officially withdrawn from the course she takes with you, and you will be expected to refrain from all contact with her. Is there anything I am omitting, Farodia, Elaine?'

Tight-lipped, Dr Rassool shakes her head.

'It's always complicated, this harassment business, David, complicated as well as unfortunate, but we believe our procedures are good and fair, so we'll just take it step by step, play it by the book. My one suggestion is, acquaint yourself with the procedures and perhaps get legal advice.'

He is about to reply, but Hakim raises a warning hand. 'Sleep on it, David,' he says.

He has had enough. 'Don't tell me what to do, I'm not a child.'

He leaves in a fury. But the building is locked and the doorkeeper has gone home. The back exit is locked too. Hakim has to let him out.

It is raining. 'Share my umbrella,' says Hakim; then, at his car, 'Speaking personally, David, I want to tell you you have all my sympathy. Really. These things can be hell.'

He has known Hakim for years, they used to play tennis together in his tennis-playing days, but he is in no mood now for male chumminess. He shrugs irritably, gets into his car.

The case is supposed to be confidential, but of course it is not, of course people talk. Why else, when he enters the common-room, does a hush fall on the chatter, why does a younger colleague, with whom he has hitherto had perfectly cordial relations, put down her teacup and depart, looking straight through him as she passes? Why do only two students turn up for the first Baudelaire class?

The gossip-mill, he thinks, turning day and night, grinding reputations. The community of the righteous, holding their sessions in corners, over the telephone, behind closed doors. Gleeful whispers. Schadenfreude. First the sentence, then the trial.

In the corridors of the Communications Building he makes a point of walking with head held high.

He speaks to the lawyer who handled his divorce. 'Let's get it clear first,' says the lawyer, 'how true are the allegations?'

'True enough. I was having an affair with the girl.'

'Serious?'

'Does seriousness make it better or worse? After a certain age, all affairs are serious. Like heart attacks.'

'Well, my advice would be, as a matter of strategy, get a woman to represent you.' He mentions two names. 'Aim for a private settlement. You give certain undertakings, perhaps take a spell of leave, in return for which the university persuades the girl, or her family, to drop the charges. Your best hope. Take a yellow card. Minimize the damage, wait for the scandal to blow over.'

'What kind of undertakings?'

'Sensitivity training. Community service. Counselling. Whatever you can negotiate.'

'Counselling? I need counselling?'

'Don't misunderstand me. I'm simply saying that one of the options offered to you might be counselling.'

'To fix me? To cure me? To cure me of inappropriate desires?'

The lawyer shrugs. 'Whatever.'

On campus it is Rape Awareness

Week. Women Against Rape, WAR, announces a twenty-four-hour vigil in solidarity with 'recent victims'. A pamphlet is slipped under his door: 'WOMEN SPEAK OUT.' Scrawled in pencil at the bottom is a message: 'YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA.'

c) He goes off to the Animal Welfare clinic as often as he can, offering himself for whatever jobs call for no skill: feeding, cleaning, mopping up.

The animals they care for at the clinic are mainly dogs, less frequently cats: for livestock, D Village appears to have its own veterinary lore, its own pharmacopoeia, its own healers. The dogs that are brought in suffer from distempers, from broken limbs, from infected bites, from mange, from neglect, benign or malign, from old age, from malnutrition, from intestinal parasites, but most of all from their own fertility. There are simply too many of them. When people bring a dog in they do not say straight out, 'I have brought you this dog to kill,' but that is what is expected: that they will dispose of it, make it disappear, dispatch it to oblivion. What is being asked for is, in fact, Lösung (German always to hand with an appropriately blank abstraction): sublimation, as alcohol is sublimed from water, leaving no residue, no aftertaste.

So on Sunday afternoons the clinic door is closed and locked while he helps Bev Shaw lösen the week's superfluous canines. One at a time he fetches them out of the cage at the back and leads or carries them into the theatre. To each, in what will be its last minutes, Bev gives her fullest attention, stroking it, talking to it, easing its passage. If, more often than not, the dog fails to be charmed, it is because of his presence: he gives off the wrong smell (They can smell your thoughts), the smell of shame. Nevertheless, he is the one who holds the dog still as the needle finds the vein and the drug hits the heart and the legs buckle and the eyes dim.

He had thought he would get used to it. But that is not what happens. The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy's kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake.

He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals. Although in an abstract way he disapproves of cruelty, he cannot tell whether by nature he is cruel or kind. He is simply nothing. He assumes that people from whom cruelty is demanded in the line of duty, people who work in slaughterhouses, for instance, grow carapaces over their souls. Habit hardens: it must be so in most cases, but it does not seem to be so in his. He does not seem to have the gift of hardness.

2.2. Zadie Smith. *White Teeth* (2000)

Zadie Smith was born in 1975, in London, England. Her father was British and her mother – Jamaican. She read English at Cambridge, graduating in 1997. Due to her career development, marriage and personal life, Smith had lived in such cities as Rome, New York and London. Her young age, her ethnicity, and the success of her first novel established her as one of the writers who could best represent the multicultural milieu of Britain at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Professional recognition as a writer came to Z. Smith quite early, with the publication of her first novel *White Teeth* in 2000. Her most notable literary awards include the Whitbread First Novel Award, the Guardian First Book Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and the Commonwealth Writers' First Book Award. Her novel is also included in *Time* magazine's 100 best English-language novels published from 1923 to 2005, and she also holds a number of others prizes.

Her acclaimed first novel, *White Teeth* is a panorama of life in the late 20th-century London, which is presented through a multicultural perspective and follows the lives and world outlooks of three ethnically diverse families. *White Teeth* has been translated into over twenty languages. It was also made into a TV serial in 2002.

The Autograph Man (2002) pictures the life of celebrities and being obsessed with them, touches upon the themes of fame, loss and friendship. This novel is also dominated by postmodernist techniques.

On Beauty (2005) continues to explore the life of mixed-race families, although the setting is already American. Alongside with that, the novel looks at the nature of beauty, as well as different value systems in the world of academia.

The most recent novels *NW* (2012) and *Swing Time* (2016) are set in North West London, New York and West Africa. *NW* mimics James Joyce's *Ulysses,* picturing the diverse, noisy and complex life in contemporary London. Smith experiments with such modernist and postmodernist techniques as fragmentation, unusual structuring, stream-of-consciousness, graphic insertions, quotations and intertextual references to the cultures of different ages, fictional texts, as well as pop culture.

White Teeth was published in 2000, and to this day remains very "contemporary" in many ways. Behind its humoristic and ironic turns, the novel reveals a dramatic depiction of the experiences of the two families, the Iqbals – immigrants from Bangladesh, and the innate British family of the Joneses. The two fathers, Samad and Archbald (Archie), are the WWII veterans, and their long friendship underlines the events in the novel. In spite of the declared multicultural integration, the immigrants still feel unwelcome by the host society and have to overcome a number of obstacles to integration. These characters and their respective children establish complex relationships.

Discussion

1. Relate the plot lines that constitute the novel. How many can you single out? In what way are they similar and different?
2. What aspects of life does Z. Smith show in a humorous light? Why? Which of those scenes are dramatic / tragic / traumatic?
3. Which events in the novel have significance in their relationship to history, and which ones are narratives of self-identity?
4. Present the portraits of these families: the Joneses, the Iqbals, and the Chalfens. What concepts, ideologies, values stand behind them?
5. Collect information about these characters:
   - Archibald (Archie) Jones
   - Irie Ambrosia Jones
   - Samad Iqbal
   - Millat Iqbal
   - Magid Iqbal
   - Alsana Iqbal
   - Marcus Chalfen
   - Joyce Chalfen
   - Joshua Chalfen
   - Poppy Burt-Jones
6. Which other characters contribute to the multiethnic, multi-class panorama of the British society?
7. What makes the novel a piece of multicultural fiction?
8. Find and comment on the following genre features and elements of the novel: multiculturalism, postmodernism, realism, trauma. Are there any others?
9. Make a list of essential ideas expressed in the novel.

In these episodes, cultural and ethnic differences are shown. Find and comment on them.

a) “Oh yes, Mrs. Miniver.”

“Only you’ve tabled twelve motions already this evening; I think possibly somebody else –”

“Oh, it is much too important to be delayed, Mrs. Miniver. Now, if I can just –”

“*Ms* Miniver.”

“Pardon me?”

"It's just... it's *Ms* Miniver. All evening you've been... and it's, umm... actually not Mrs. It's Ms. Ms."

Samad looked quizzically at Katie Miniver, then at his papers as if to find the answer there, then at the beleaguered chairwoman again.

"I'm sorry? You are not married?"

"Divorced, actually, yes, divorced. I'm keeping the name."

"I see. You have my condolences, Miss Miniver. Now, the matter I – "

"I'm sorry," said Katie, pulling her fingers through her intractable hair. "Umm, it's not Miss, either. I'm sorry. I have been married you see, so –"

Ellen Corcoran and Janine Lanzerano, two friends from the Women's Action Group, gave Katie a supportive smile. Ellen shook her head to indicate that Katie mustn't cry (*because you're doing well, really well*); Janine mouthed *Go On* and gave her a furtive thumbs-up.

"I really wouldn't feel comforta – I just feel marital status shouldn't be an issue – it's not that I want to embarrass you, Mr. Iqbal. I just would feel more – if you – it's Ms."

"Mzzz?"

"Ms."

"And this is some kind of linguistic conflation between the words Mrs. and Miss?" asked Samad, genuinely curious and oblivious to the nether wobblings of Katie Miniver's bottom lip. "Something to describe the woman who has either lost her husband or has no prospect of finding another?"

Alsana groaned and put her head in her hands.

Samad looked at his clipboard, underlined something in pen three times and turned to the parent-governors once more.

"The Harvest Festival."

Shifting, scratching, leg-crossing, coat-repositioning.

"Yes, Mr. Iqbal," said Katie Miniver. "What *about* the Harvest Festival?"

"That is precisely what I want to know. What is all this about the Harvest Festival? What is it? *Why* is it? And why must my children celebrate it?"

The headmistress, Mrs. Owens, a genteel woman with a soft face half hidden behind a fiercely cut blonde bob, motioned to Katie Miniver that she would handle this.

"Mr. Iqbal, we have been through the matter of religious festivals quite thoroughly in the autumn review. As I am sure you are aware, the school already recognizes a great variety of religious and secular events: amongst them, Christmas, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Diwali, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, the birthday of Haile elassie, and the death of Martin Luther King. The Harvest Festival is part of the school's ongoing commitment to religious diversity, Mr. Iqbal."

"I see. And are there many pagans, Mrs. Owens, at Manor School?"

"Pagan – I'm afraid I don't under – "

"It is very simple. The Christian calendar has thirty-seven religious events. *Thirty-seven*. The Muslim calendar has nine. Only nine. And they are squeezed out by this incredible rash of Christian festivals. Now my motion is simple. If we removed all the pagan festivals from the Christian calendar, there would be an average of" – Samad paused to look at his clipboard – "of twenty days freed up in which the children could celebrate Lailat-ul-Qadr in December, Eid-ul-Fitr in January and Eid-ul-Adha in April, for example. And the first festival that must go, in my opinion, is this Harvest Festival business."

b) This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. Children with first and last names on a direct collision course. Names that secrete within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checkups. It is only this late in the day, and possibly only in Willesden, that you can find best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best – less trouble). Yet, despite all the mixing up, despite the fact that we have finally slipped into each other's lives with reasonable comfort (like a man returning to his lover's bed after a midnight walk), despite all this, it is still hard to admit that there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English. There are still young white men who are angry about that; who will roll out at closing time into the poorly lit streets with a kitchen knife wrapped in a tight fist.

But it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, disappearance. Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat (genetically BB; where B stands for Bengaliness) marrying someone called Sarah (aa, where a stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (Ba), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (aa), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren (Aaaaaaa!), their Bengaliness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype. It is both the most irrational and natural feeling in the world. In Jamaica it is even in the grammar: there is no choice of personal pronoun, no splits between me or you or they, there is only the pure, homogenous I. When Hortense Bowden, half white herself, got to hearing about Clara's marriage, she came round to the house, stood on the doorstep, said, "Understand: I and I don't speak from this moment forth," turned on her heel, and was true to her word. Hortense hadn't put all that effort into marrying black, into dragging her genes back from the brink, just so her daughter could bring yet more high-colored children into the world.

c) This episode throws light on yet another social issue. Read and comment:

Now, the children knew the city. And they knew the city breeds the Mad. They knew Mr. White-Face, an Indian who walks the streets of Willesden with his face painted white, his lips painted blue, wearing a pair of tights and some hiking boots; they knew Mr. Newspaper, a tall skinny man in an ankle-length raincoat who sits in Brent libraries removing the day's newspapers from his briefcase and methodically tearing them into strips; they knew Mad Mary, a black voodoo woman with a red face whose territory stretches from Kilburn to Oxford Street but who performs her spells from a garbage can in West Hampstead; they knew Mr. Toupee, who has no eyebrows and wears a toupee not on his head but on a string around his neck. But these people announced their madness – they were better, less scary than Mr. J. P. Hamilton – they flaunted their insanity, they weren't half mad and half not, curled around a door frame. They were properly mad in the Shakespearean sense, talking sense when you least expected it. In North London, where councillors once voted to change the name of the area to Nirvana, it is not unusual to walk the streets and be suddenly confronted by sage words from the chalk-faced, blue-lipped, or eyebrowless. From across the street or from the other end of a tube carriage they will use their schizophrenic talent for seeing connections in the random (for discerning the whole world in a grain of sand, for deriving narrative from nothing) to riddle you, to rhyme you, to strip you down, to tell you who you are and where you're going (usually Baker Street – the great majority of modern-day seers travel the Metropolitan Line) and why. But as a city we are not appreciative of these people. Our gut instinct is that they intend to embarrass us, that they're out to shame us somehow as they lurch down the train aisle, bulbous-eyed and with carbuncled nose, preparing to ask us, inevitably, what we are looking at. What the fuck we are looking at. As a kind of preemptive defense mechanism, Londoners have learned not to look, never to look, to avoid eyes at all times so that the dreaded question "What you looking at?" and its pitiful, gutless, useless answer – "Nothing" – might be avoided. But as the prey evolves (and we are prey to the Mad who are pursuing us, desperate to impart their own brand of truth to the hapless commuter) so does the hunter, and the true professionals begin to tire of that old catchphrase "What you looking at?" and move into more exotic territory. Take Mad Mary. Oh, the principle's still the same, it's still all about eye contact and the danger of making it, but now she's making eye contact from a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred yards away, and if she catches you doing the same she roars down the street, dreads and feathers and cape afloat, Hoodoo stick in hand, until she gets to where you are, spits on you, and begins. Samad knew all of this – they'd had dealings before, he and red-faced Mad Mary; he'd even suffered

the misfortune of having her sit next to him on a bus. Any other day and Samad would have given her as good as he got. But today he was feeling guilty and vulnerable, today he was holding Poppy's hand as the sun crept away; he could not face Mad Mary and her vicious truth-telling, her ugly madness – which of course was precisely why she was stalking him, quite deliberately stalking him down Church Road.

2.3. Margaret Atwood. *The Blind Assassin* (2000)

Margaret Atwood, the Canadian writer, was born in Ottawa, Ontario, in 1939. She studied at the University of Toronto and got her MA in Massachusetts. Her working career began with teaching and various academic posts. She is an extremely prolific and active author of various fiction and poetry genres – novels, short stories, poetry – as well as non-fiction: criticism, screenplays, books for children.

Atwood is often placed within feminist fiction. However, as it has appeared so far, the 21st century feminist discourse has merged with other, more prominent social themes and issues. Among Atwood's characters, strong, often enigmatic women prevail within such genres as postmodern metafictional novels, dystopias, historical and pseudo-historical narratives, novels of trauma. Often she depicts a bodily harm, like in her first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969), where the main character cannot eat and feels that she is being eaten, or *Bodily Harm* (1982) looking at breast cancer, as well as political struggles. The most famous of Atwood's 20th-century novels was *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), a feminist dystopia, which was made into a successful TV series. *Cat's Eye* (1989), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996) – all deal with various women issues, including female bullying.

Atwood's 21st-century inauguration novel was the Booker Prize winning *The Blind Assassin* (2000), involving a family story in the context of history of Canada in the 1930–1940s. The dystopian form was also elaborated in her trilogy: *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013). *The Testaments* (2019) is a kind of sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Atwood's most distinguished literary awards are the Los Angeles Times Fiction Award (1986), Arthur C. Clarke Award for best Science Fiction (1987), Booker Prize (2000, 2019), and some literary awards from foreign countries, such as the Franz Kafka Prize of the Czech Republic (2017).

Atwood's multifaceted novel *The Blind Assassin* (2000) opens with an intriguing statement: "Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura

drove a car off a bridge". However, this mystery is not resolved soon. The narrator Iris in fact has a role in her sister's suicide, which happened many years ago: she divulged the secret that she knew would devastate Laura. Later, her guilt becomes impossible to contain: "My fingers itched with spite. I knew what had happened next. I'd pushed her off". Details of the family's past history are unwound, and we get into the tangle of relationships, betrayals and madness. One version of event replaces another and another, thus creating a kind of collage, where the self is never fully defined.

Discussion

1. Some critics call it a "post-feminist" novel. Can you say why?
2. How many version of the events are presented and who are the "authors" of these versions?
3. What genre would you offer to define the novel by? Can we think of it as a crime/psychological/social/trauma/etc. novel?
4. Which moral issues connected with the dichotomy "guilt-innocence" can you identify?
5. How effectively does the author portray the following characters?
   - Iris Chase Griffen
   - Laura Chase
   - Richard Griffen
   - Winifred Griffen Prior
   - Alex Thomas
6. Which ontological, moral and interpersonal problems are raised in the book?
7. What is the "detective" line of the narrative?
8. What role does the concept of memory play?
9. Which episodes depict the language's unreliability?
10. Comment on the problem of aging and disability. How important is it in the new century?
11. Which scenes / moments in the novel do you personally find most enlightening / emotionally strong / important for understanding the key ideas?

In these episodes, the motifs of guilt, memory, the importance of language are revealed. Identify the place of these episodes in the novel and comment of their psychological relevance.

a) Avilion

My bones have been aching again, as they often do in humid weather. They ache like history: things long done with, that still reverberate as pain. When the ache is bad enough it keeps me from sleeping. Every night I yearn for sleep, I strive for it; yet it flutters on ahead of me like a sooty curtain. There are sleeping pills, of course, but the doctor has warned me against them.

Last night, after what seemed hours of damp turmoil, I got up and crept slipperless down the stairs, feeling my way in the faint shine from the street light outside the stairwell window. Once safely arrived at the bottom, I shambled into the kitchen and nosed around in the misty dazzle of the refrigerator. There was nothing much I wanted to eat: the draggled remains of a bunch of celery, a blue-tinged heel of bread, a lemon going soft. An end of cheese, wrapped in greasy paper and hard and translucent as toenails. I've fallen into the habits of the solitary; my meals are snatched and random. Furtive snacks, furtive treats and picnics. I made do with some peanut butter, scooped directly from the jar with a forefinger: why dirty a spoon?

Standing there with the jar in one hand and my finger in my mouth, I had the feeling that someone was about to walk into the room – some other woman, the unseen, valid owner – and ask me what in hell I was doing in her kitchen. I've had it before, the sense that even in the course of my most legitimate and daily actions – peeling a banana, brushing my teeth – I am trespassing.

At night the house was more than ever like a stranger's. I wandered through the front rooms, the dining room, the parlour, hand on the wall for balance. My various possessions were floating in their own pools of shadow, detached from me, denying my ownership of them. I looked them over with a burglar's eye, deciding what might be worth the risk of stealing, what on the other hand I would leave behind. Robbers would take the obvious things – the silver teapot that was my grandmother's, perhaps the hand-painted china. The remaining monogrammed spoons. The television set. Nothing I really want.

All of it will have to be gone through, disposed of by someone or other, when I die. Myra will corner the job, no doubt; she thinks she has inherited me from Reenie. She'll enjoy playing the trusted family retainer. I don't envy her: any life is a rubbish dump even while it's being lived, and more so afterwards. But if a rubbish dump, a surprisingly small one; when you've cleared up after the dead, you know how few green plastic garbage bags you yourself are likely to take up in your turn.

The nutcracker shaped like an alligator, the lone mother-of pearl cuff link, the tortoiseshell comb with missing teeth. The broken silver lighter, the saucerless cup, the cruet stand minus the vinegar. The scattered bones of home, the rags, the relics. Shards washed ashore after shipwreck.

Today Myra persuaded me to buy an electric fan – one on a tall stand, better than the creaky little thing I've been relying on. The sort she had in mind was on sale at the new mall across the Jogues River bridge. She would drive me there: she was going anyway, it would be no trouble. It's dispiriting, the way she invents pretexts.

Our route took us past Avilion, or what was once Avilion, now so sadly transformed. Valhalla, it is now. What bureaucratic moron decided this was a suitable name for an old-age home? As I recall, Valhalla was where you went after you were dead, not immediately before. But perhaps some point was intended.

The location is prime – the east bank of the Louveteau River, at the confluence with the Jogues – thus combining a romantic view of the Gorge with a safe mooring for sailboats. The house is large but it looks crowded now, shouldered aside by the flimsy bungalows that went up on the grounds after the war. Three elderly women were sitting on the front porch, one in a wheelchair, furtively smoking, like naughty adolescents in the washroom. One of these days they'll burn the place down for sure.

I haven't been back inside Avilion since they converted it; it reeks no doubt of baby powder and sour urine and day-old boiled potatoes. I'd rather remember it the way it was, even at the time I knew it, when shabbiness was already setting in – the cool, spacious halls, the polished expanse of the kitchen, the Sevres bowl filled with dried petals on the small round cherrywood table in the front hall. Upstairs, in Laura's room, there's a chip out of the mantelpiece, from where she dropped a firedog; so typical. I'm the only person who knows this, any more. Considering her appearance – her lucent skin, her look of pliability, her long ballerina's neck – people expected her to be graceful.

Avilion is not the standard-issue limestone. Its planners wanted something more unusual, and so it is constructed of rounded river cobblestones all cemented together. From a distance the effect is warty, like the skin of a dinosaur or the wishing wells in picture books. Ambition's mausoleum, I think of it now.

It isn't a particularly elegant house, but it was once thought imposing in its way – a merchant's palace, with a curved driveway leading to it, a stumpy Gothic turret, and a wide semi-circular spooled verandah overlooking the two rivers, where tea was served to ladies in flowered hats during the languid summer afternoons at the century's turn. String quartets were once stationed there for garden parties; my grandmother and her friends used it as a stage, for amateur theatricals, at dusk, with torches set around; Laura and I used to hide under it. It's begun to sag, that verandah; it needs a paint job.

Once there was a gazebo, and a walled kitchen garden, and several plots of ornamentals, and a lily pond with goldfish in it, and a steam-heated glass conservatory, demolished now, that grew ferns and fuschias and the occasional spindly lemon and sour orange. There was a billiards room, and a drawing room

and a morning room, and a library with a marble Medusa over the fireplace – the nineteenth-century type of Medusa, with a lovely impervious gaze, the snakes writhing up out of her head like anguished thoughts. The mantelpiece was French: a different one had been ordered, something with Dionysus and vines, but the Medusa came instead, and France was a long way to send it back, and so they used that one.

There was a vast dim dining room with William Morris wallpaper, the Strawberry Thief design, and a chandelier entwined with bronze water-lilies, and three high stained-glass windows, shipped in from England, showing episodes from the story of Tristan and Iseult (the proffering of the love potion, in a ruby-red cup; the lovers,Tristan on one knee, Iseult yearning over him with her yellow hair cascading – hard to render in glass, a little too much like a melting broom; Iseult alone, dejected, in purple draperies, a harp nearby).

The planning and decoration of this house were supervised by my Grandmother Adelia. She died before I was born, but from what I've heard she was as smooth as silk and as cool as a cucumber, but with a will like a bone saw. Also she went in for Culture, which gave her a certain moral authority. It wouldn't now; but people believed, then, that Culture could make you better – a better person. They believed it could uplift you, or the women believed it. They hadn't yet seen Hitler at the opera house.

Adelia's maiden name was Montfort. She was from an established family, or what passed for it in Canada – second-generation Montreal English crossed with Huguenot French. These Montforts had been prosperous once – they'd made a bundle on railroads – but through risky speculations and inertia they were already halfway down the slippery slope. So when time had begun to run out on Adelia with no really acceptable husband in sight, she'd married money – crude money, button money. She was expected to refine this money, like oil.

(She wasn't married, she was married off, said Reenie, rolling out the gingersnaps. The family arranged it. That's what was done in such families, and who's to say it was any worse or better than choosing for yourself? In any case, Adelia Montfort did her duty, and lucky to have the chance, as she was getting long in the tooth by then – she must have been twenty-three, which was counted over the hill in those days.)

I still have a portrait of my grandparents; it's set in a silver frame, with convolvulus blossoms, and was taken soon after their wedding. In the background are a fringed velvet curtain and two ferns on stands. Grandmother Adelia reclines on a chaise, a heavy-lidded, handsome woman, in many draperies and a long double string of pearls and a plunging, lace-bordered neckline, her white forearms boneless as rolled chicken. Grandfather Benjamin sits behind her in formal kit, substantial but embarrassed, as if he's been tarted up for the occasion. They both look corseted.

b) Where was I?

The bell had rung. The throat was slit. The door was opening.

Oh. Right, then.

He says: The girl of whom we have been speaking has heard the door open. She backs against the wall, pulling the red brocade of the Bed of One Night tightly around herself. It has a brackish odour, like a salt marsh at low tide: the dried fear of those who have gone before her. Someone has come in; there's the sound of a heavy object being dragged along the floor. The door closes again; the room is dark as oil. Why is there no lamp, no candle?

She stretches her hands out in front of her to protect herself, and finds her left hand taken and held by another hand: held gently and without coercion. It's as if she's being asked a question.

She can't speak. She can't say, I can't speak.

The blind assassin lets his woman's veil fall to the floor. Holding the girl's hand, he sits down on the bed beside her. He still intends to kill her, but that can come later. He's heard about these impounded girls, kept hidden away from everyone until the last day of their lives; he's curious about her. In any case she's a gift of sorts, and all for him. To refuse such a gift would be to spit in the face of the gods. He knows he should move swiftly, finish the job, vanish, but there's lots of time for that still. He can smell the scent they've rubbed on her; it smells of funeral biers, those of young women who've died unwed. Wasted sweetness.

He won't be ruining anything, or nothing that's been bought and paid for: the fraudulent Lord of the Underworld must have been and gone already. Had he kept his rusty chainmail on? Most likely. Clanked into her like a ponderous iron key, turned himself in her flesh, wrenched her open. He remembers the feeling all too well. Whatever else, he will not do that.

He lifts her hand to his mouth and touches his lips to it, not a kiss as such but a token of respect and homage. Gracious and most golden one, he says – the beggar's standard address to a prospective benefactor – rumour of your extreme beauty has brought me here, though simply by being here my life is forfeit. I can't see you with my eyes, because I'm blind. Will you permit me to see you with my hands? It would be a last kindness, and perhaps for yourself as well.

He hasn't been a slave and a whore for nothing: he's learned how to flatter, how to lie plausibly, how to ingratiate himself. He puts his fingers on her chin, and waits until she hesitates, then nods. He can hear what she's thinking: Tomorrow I'll be dead. He wonders if she guesses why he's really here.

Some of the best things are done by those with nowhere to turn, by those who don't have time, by those who truly understand the word helpless. They dispense with the calculation of risk and profit, they take no thought for the future, they're forced at spearpoint into the present tense. Thrown over a precipice,

you fall or else you fly; you clutch at any hope, however unlikely; however – if I may use such an overworked word – miraculous. What we mean by that is, Against all odds.

And so it is, this night.

The blind assassin begins very slowly to touch her, with one hand only, the right – the dexterous hand, the knife hand. He passes it over her face, down her throat; then he adds the left hand, the sinister hand, using both together, tenderly, as if picking a lock of the utmost fragility, a lock made of silk. It's like being caressed by water. She trembles, but not as before with fear. After a time she lets the red brocade fall away from around her, and takes his hand and guides it.

Touch comes before sight, before speech. It is the first language and the last, and it always tells the truth.

This is how the girl who couldn't speak and the man who couldn't see fell in love.

You surprise me, she says.

Do I? he says. Why? Though I like to surprise you. He lights a cigarette, offers her one; she shakes her head for no. He's smoking too much. It's nerves, despite his steady hands.

Because you said they fell in love, she says. You've sneered at that notion often enough – not realistic, bourgeois superstition, rotten at the core. Sickly sentiment, a high-flown Victorian excuse for honest carnality. Going soft on yourself?

Don't blame me, blame history, he says, smiling. Such things happen. Falling in love has been recorded, or at least those words have. Anyway, I said he was lying.

You can't wiggle out of it that way. The lying was only at first. Then you changed it.

Point granted. But there could be a more callous way of looking at it.

Looking at what?

This falling in love business.

Since when is it a business? she says angrily.

He smiles. That notion bother you? Too commercial? Your own conscience would flinch, is that what you're saying? But there's always a tradeoff, isn't there?

No, she says. There isn't. Not always.

You might say he grabbed what he could get. Why wouldn't he? He had no scruples, his life was dog eat dog and it always had been. Or you could say they were both young so they didn't know any better. The young habitually mistake lust for love, they're infested with idealism of all kinds. And I haven't said he didn't kill her afterwards. As I've pointed out, he was nothing if not self-interested.

So you've got cold feet, she says. You're backing down, you're chicken. You won't go all the way. You're to love as a cock-teaser is to fucking.

He laughs, a startled laugh. Is it the coarseness of the words, is he taken aback, has she finally managed that? Restrain your language, young lady.

Why should I? You don't.

I'm a bad example. Let's just say they could indulge themselves – their emotions, if you want to call it that. They could roll around in their emotions – live for the moment, spout poetry out of both ends, burn the candle, drain the cup, howl at the moon. Time was running out on them. They had nothing to lose.

He did. Or he certainly thought he did!

All right then. She had nothing to lose. He blows out a cloud of smoke.

Not like me, she says, I guess you mean.

Not like you, darling, he says. Like me. I'm the one with nothing to lose.

She says, But you've got me. I'm not nothing.

The Toronto Star, August 28, 1935

SOCIETY SCHOOLGIRL FOUND SAFE

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Police called off their search yesterday for fifteen-year-old society schoolgirl Laura Chase, missing for over a week, when Miss Chase was found safely lodged with family friends Mr. and Mrs. E. Newton-Dobbs at their summer residence in Muskoka. Well-known industrialist Richard E. Griffen, married to Miss Chase's sister, spoke to reporters by telephone on behalf of the family. "My wife and I are very relieved," he said. "It was a simple confusion, caused by a letter which was delayed in the post. Miss Chase made holiday arrangements of which she believed us to have been aware, as did her host and hostess. They do not read the newspapers while on vacation or this mix-up would never have occurred. When they returned to the city and became aware of the situation, they rang us immediately."

Questioned about rumours that Miss Chase had run away from home and had been located in curious circumstances at the Sunnyside Beach Amusement Park, Mr. Griffen said he did not know who was responsible for these malicious fabrications but he would make it his business to find out. "It was an ordinary misunderstanding, such as might happen to anybody," he stated. "My wife and I are grateful that she is safe, and sincerely thank the police, the newspapers, and the concerned public for their help." Miss Chase is said to have been unsettled by the publicity, and is refusing interviews.

Although no lasting harm was done, these are by no means the first serious difficulties to have been caused by faulty postal delivery. The public deserves a service it can rely on unquestioningly. Government officials should take note.

The Blind Assassin: Street walk

She walks along the street, hoping she looks like a woman entitled to be walking along the street. Or along this street. She doesn't, though. She's dressed wrong, her hat is wrong, her coat is wrong. She ought to have a scarf tied over her head and under her chin, a baggy coat worn along the sleeves. She ought to look drab and frugal.

The houses here are cheek by jowl. Servants' cottages once, row on row, but there are fewer servants now, and the rich have made other provisions. Sooty brick,

two up, two down, privy out back. Some have the remains of vegetable gardens on their tiny front lawns – a blackened tomato vine, a wooden stake with string dangling from it. The gardens couldn't have gone well – it would have been too shady, the earth too cindery. But even here the autumn trees have been lavish, the remaining leaves yellow and orange and vermilion, and a deeper red like fresh liver.

From inside the houses comes howling, barking, a rattle or slam. Female voices raised in thwarted rage, the defiant yells of children. On the cramped porches men sit on wooden chairs, hands dangling from knees, out of work but not yet out of house and home. Their eyes on her, their scowls, taking bitter stock of her with her fur trim at wrists and neck, her lizard handbag. It could be they are lodgers, crammed into cellars and odd corners to help cover the rent.

Women hurry along, heads down, shoulders hunched, carrying brown paper bundles. Married, they must be. The word braised comes to mind. They'll have been scrounging bones from the butcher, they'll be toting home the cheap cuts, to be served with flabby cabbage. Her shoulders are too far back, her chin too far up, she doesn't wear that beaten-down look: when they raise their heads enough to focus on her, the glances are filthy. They must think she's a hooker, but in shoes like that what's she doing down here? Way below her league.

Here's the bar, on the corner where he said it would be. The beer parlour. Men are gathered in a clump outside it. None of them says anything to her as she goes past, they just stare as if from thickets, but she can hear the muttering, hatred and lust mixed in the throat, following her like the wash from a ship. Perhaps they've mistaken her for a church worker or some other sniffy do-gooder. Poking scrubbed fingers into their lives, asking questions, offering table scraps of patronizing help. But she's dressed too well for that.

She took a taxi, paid it off three blocks away, where there was more traffic. It's best not to become an anecdote: who'd take a cab, around here? Though she's an anecdote anyway. What she needs is a different coat, picked up at a rummage sale, crumpled into a suitcase. She could go into a hotel restaurant, leave her own coat at the check, slip into the powder room, change. Frump up her hair, smudge her lipstick. Emerge as a different woman.

No. It would never work. There's the suitcase, just to begin with; there's getting out of the house with it. Where are you off to in such a hurry?

And so she's stuck doing a cloak-and-dagger number without a cloak. Relying on her face alone, its guile. She's had enough practice by now, in smoothness, coolness, blankness. A lifting of both eyebrows, the candid, transparent stare of a double agent. A face of pure water. It's not the lying that counts, it's evading the necessity for it. Rendering all questions foolish in advance.

There is however some danger. For him too: more than there was, he's told her. He thinks he was spotted once, on the street: recognized. Some goon from the Red Squad, maybe. He'd walked through a crowded beer joint, out the back door.

She doesn't know whether to believe in it or not, this sort of danger: men in dark bulgy suits with their collars turned up, cars on the prowl. Come with us. We're taking you in. Bare rooms and harsh lights. It seems too theatrical, or else like things that occur only in fog, in black and white. Only in other countries, in other languages. Or if here, not to her.

If caught, she'd renounce him, before the cock crowed even once. She knows that, plainly, calmly. Anyway she'd be let off, her involvement viewed as frivolous dabbling or else a rebellious prank, and whatever turmoil might result would be covered up. She'd have to pay for it privately, of course, but with what? She's already bankrupt: you can't get blood from a stone. She'd close herself off, put up the shutters. Out to lunch, permanently.

Lately she's had the sense of someone watching her, though whenever she reconnoitres there's nobody there. She's being more careful; she's being as careful as she can. Is she afraid? Yes. Most of the time. But her fear doesn't matter. Or rather, it does matter. It enhances the pleasure she feels with him; also the sense that she's getting away with it.

The real danger comes from herself. What she'll allow, how far she's willing to go. But allowing and willing have nothing to do with it. Where she'll be pushed, then; where she'll be led. She hasn't examined her motives. There may not be any motives as such; desire is not a motive. It doesn't seem to her that she has any choice. Such extreme pleasure is also a humiliation. It's like being hauled along by a shameful rope, a leash around the neck. She resents it, her lack of freedom, and so she stretches out the time between, rationing him. She stands him up, fibs about why she couldn't make it – claims she didn't see the chalked markings on the park wall, didn't get the message – the new address of the non-existent dress shop, the postcard signed by an old friend she's never had, the telephone call for the wrong number.

But in the end, back she comes. There's no use resisting. She goes to him for amnesia, for oblivion. She renders herself up, is blotted out; enters the darkness of her own body, forgets her name. Immolation is what she wants, however briefly. To exist without boundaries.

c) The threshold

Today it's raining, a warm spring rain. The air is opalescent with it. The sound of the rapids pours up and over the cliff – pours like a wind, but unmoving, like wave marks left on sand.

I'm sitting at the wooden table on my back porch, in the shelter of the overhang, gazing out over the long straggling garden. It's almost dusk. The wild phlox is in bloom, or I believe it must be phlox; I can't see it clearly. Something blue, that glimmers down there at the end of the garden, the phosphorescence of snow in shadow. In the flower beds the shoots jostle upwards, crayon-shaped, purple,

aqua, red. The scent of moist dirt and fresh growth washes in over me, watery, slippery, with an acid taste to it like the bark of a tree. It smells like youth; it smells like heartbreak.

I've swathed myself in a shawl: the evening is warm for the season, but I don't feel it as warmth, only as an absence of cold. I view the world clearly from here – here being the landscape glimpsed from the top of a wave, just before the next one drives you under: how blue the sky, how green the sea, how final the prospect.

Beside my elbow is the stack of paper I've been adding to so laboriously, month after month. When I'm done – when I've written the final page – I'll pull myself up out of this chair and make my way to the kitchen, and scrabble around for an elastic band or a piece of string or an old ribbon. I'll tie the papers up, then lift the lid of my steamer trunk and slide this bundle in on top of everything else. There it will stay until you come back from your travels, if you ever do come back. The lawyer has the key, and his orders.

I must admit I have a daydream about you.

One evening there will be a knock at the door and it will be you. You'll be dressed in black, you'll be toting one of those little rucksacks they all have now instead of handbags. It will be raining, as it is this evening, but you won't have an umbrella, you'd scorn umbrellas; the young like their heads to be whipped about by the elements, they find it bracing. You'll stand on the porch, in a haze of damp light; your glossy dark hair will be sodden, your black outfit will be soaked, the drops of rain will glitter on your face and clothes like sequins. You'll knock. I'll hear you, I'll shuffle down the hallway, I'll open the door. My heart will jump and flutter; I'll peer at you, then recognize you: my cherished, my last remaining wish. I'll think to myself that I've never seen anyone so beautiful, but I won't say so; I wouldn't want you to think I've gone scatty. Then I'll welcome you, I'll hold out my arms to you, I'll kiss you on the cheek, sparsely, because it would be unseemly to let myself go. I'll cry a few tears, but only a few, because the eyes of the elderly are arid.

I'll invite you in. You'll enter. I wouldn't recommend it to a young girl, crossing the threshold of a place like mine, with a person like me inside it – an old woman, an older woman, living alone in a fossilized cottage, with hair like burning spiderwebs and a weedy garden full of God knows what. There's a whiff of brimstone about such creatures: you may even be a little frightened of me. But you'll also be a little reckless, like all the women in our family, and so you will come in anyway. Grandmother , you will say; and through that one word I will no longer be disowned.

I'll sit you down at my table, among the wooden spoons and the twig wreaths, and the candle which is never lit. You'll be shivering, I'll give you a towel, I'll wrap you in a blanket, I'll make you some cocoa.

Then I'll tell you a story. I'll tell you this story: the story of how you came to be here, sitting in my kitchen, listening to the story I've been telling you. If by some miracle that were to happen, there would be no need for this jumbled mound of paper.

What is it that I'll want from you? Not love: that would be too much to ask. Not forgiveness, which isn't yours to bestow. Only a listener, perhaps; only someone who will see me. Don't prettify me though, whatever else you do: I have no wish to be a decorated skull.

But I leave myself in your hands. What choice do I have? By the time you read this last page, that – if anywhere – is the only place I will be.

2.4. Joyce Carol Oates. *Blonde* (2000)

Joyce Carol Oates was born in Lockport, New York, in 1938. She grew up on a farm, but always loved literature and writing. Oates graduated from Syracuse University with a B. A. summa cum laude. Her M. A. was from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. She studied for a Ph. D., but the writing career attracted her more. She and her husband worked for a time as co-editors for *The Ontario Review*. Oates had several teaching positions in her life, including at Princeton University.

Oates is one of the most fascinatingly prolific authors in the world – having produced over 60 novels, as many short story collections, and a similar number of books for children, plays, poetry and non-fiction, etc. She is best known, however, for such novels as *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart* (1990), *The Falls* (2004), *The Gravedigger's Daughter* (2007) and numerous others, becoming frequent bestsellers including the *New York Times* bestsellers) and winners of such prestigious awards as the National Book Award, the Bram Stoker Award (several times), the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Fiction, the Jerusalem Prize, several times – the Pulitzer Prize finalist.

Her fascinating and very recognizable style is often termed as neo-Gothic. However, as she claims, all her material comes from real life, but she masterfully dresses it in fantasy, exploring the subconscious realms of human nature, exposing its troublesome and frightening manifestations.

Her long marriage to Raymond J. Smith ended with his death in 2008, and Oates suffered tremendously emotionally (which is reflected in the memoir *A Widow's Story*). She remarried however, but outlived her second husband, too.

Oates has also written suspense novels under the pseudonyms Rosamond Smith and Lauren Kelly.

In the novel *Blonde* (2000), Oates presents a fictionalized biography and portrayal of Marilyn Monroe (Norma Jeane Mortensen) – the mid-20th-century sex and beauty icon. Her path in life was far from epicurean. An idol created to be admired, she was often betrayed, envied and exploited – a source of income and success for others. Her growing fame proportionately brings about her deep inner conflict, which is traced back to her childhood, and uneasy relations with her mother, who was eventually taken to a mental institution, and especially the unfulfilled promise about the return of her father. Her whole life is a search-of-father-quest. Manipulative and deceitful people often surround Norma. Even her death is shown to be actually an ordered murder.

Oates explores Norma's love relationships as well, her adoption as a child and her unhappy first marriage, rape during the rise in her career as a model, and her life as an actress. Followed by other empty relationships, abortion, disillusionment, betrayals Norma Jeane begins to experience mental troubles which lead to the divorce in her second marriage. The novel uses a certain dose of fiction, but the psychological portrait seems to be very credible.

Discussion

1. What features of a fictionalized biography genre does the novel possess?
2. What external and internal conflicts affect Norma Jeane? Characterize her as objectively as possible.
3. Analyze Norma's/Marilyn's rise to fame and decline to disillusionment and mental trouble. Are they interconnected?
4. How is the search for father essential for Norma's personality formation?
5. Which of the following characters played most crucial roles in Marilyn's psychological destruction?
   - Gladys Mortensen
   - Buchanan Glazer
   - Otto Öse
   - Mr. Z
   - V
   - Cass Chaplin
   - Eddy G. Robinson Jr.
   - Ex-Athlete
   - Playwright
   - the President
6. Which ontological, moral and deeply psychological issues are raised in the book?

7. Which scenes / moments in the novel do you personally find most dramatic?
8. What importance does the novel hold for American literature, in your opinion?
9. Did the novel change your initial picture of Marilyn Monroe?

Comment on this episode: what secrets from the life of the celebrity does the writer share with the reader?

It is in early childhood that the born actor emerges, for it is in early childhood that the world is first perceived as Mystery. The origin of all acting is improvisation in the face of Mystery. – T. Navarro, *The Paradox of Acting*

See? That man is your father.

There was a day, it was Norma Jeane's sixth birthday, the first day of June 1932, and a magical morning it was, blinding breathless whitely dazzling, in Venice Beach, California. The wind off the Pacific Ocean fresh and cool and astringent, smelling only faintly of the usual briny rot and beach debris. And borne, it seemed, by that very wind came Mother. Gaunt-faced Mother with her luscious red lips and plucked and penciled brows who came for Norma Jeane where she was living with her grandparents in a pockmarked old ruin of a beige stucco building on Venice Boulevard – "Norma Jeane, come!" And Norma Jeane ran, ran to Mother! Her pudgy little hand caught in Mother's slender hand, that feel of the black-net glove strange to her and wonderful. For Grandma's hands were chafed old-woman's hands, as Grandma's smell was an old-woman smell, but Mother's smell was so sweet it made you dizzy, like a taste of hot sugary lemon. "Norma Jeane, my love – come." For Mother was "Gladys," and "Gladys" was the child's true mother. When she chose to be. When she was strong enough. When the demands of The Studio allowed. For Gladys's life was "three dimensions verging into four" and not "flat as a Parcheesi board" like most lives. And in the face of Grandma Della's flustered disapproval, Mother led Norma Jeane in triumph out of the third-floor apartment reeking with onions, lye soap, and bunion ointment, and Grandpa's pipe tobacco, ignoring the older woman's outrage like a frantic-comic radio voice – "Gladys, whose car are you driving this time?" – "Look at me, girl: Are you hopped up? Are you drunk?" – "When will you be bringing my granddaughter back?" – "Damn you, wait for me, wait till I get my shoes on, I'm coming downstairs too! Gladys!" And Mother called out in her calmly maddening soprano voice, "'Qué sera, sera.'" And giggling like naughty pursued children, Mother and Daughter hurried down flights of stairs as down a mountainside, breathless and gripping hands, and so out! outside! to Venice Boulevard and the excitement of Gladys's car, never a predictable car, parked

at the curb; and on this bright-dazzling morning of the first of June 1932 the magical car was, as Norma Jeane stared, smiling, a humpbacked Nash the hue of dishwater when the soap has gone flat, the passenger's window cracked like a spiderweb and mended with tape. Yet what a wonderful car, and how young and excited Gladys was, she who rarely touched Norma Jeane now lifting her with both net-gloved hands into the passenger's seat – "Whoops, baby-love!" – as if lifting her into the seat of the Ferris wheel at Santa Monica pier to bear her, wide-eyed and thrilled, into the sky. And slammed the door beside her, hard. And made certain it was locked. (For there was an old fear, a fear of Mother for Daughter, that during such flights, a car door might open, as a trapdoor might open in a silent film, and Daughter would be lost!) And climbing into the driver's seat behind the wheel like Lindbergh into the cockpit of the Spirit of St. Louis. And revved the motor, and shifted gears, and pulled out into traffic even as poor Grandma Della, a mottled-faced fattish woman in a faded cotton housecoat and rolled cotton "support" stockings and old-woman shoes, burst out onto the front stoop of the building like Charlie Chaplin the Little Tramp in frantic-comic distress.

"Wait! Oh, you wait! Crazy woman! Hophead! I forbid you! I'll call the police!"

But there was no waiting, oh, no.

Hardly time to breathe!

"Ignore your grandmother, dear. She is silent film and we are talkies."

For Gladys, who was this child's true mother, would not be cheated of Mother Love on this special day. Feeling "stronger, at last" and with a few bucks saved, so Gladys had come for Norma Jeane on the child's birthday (her sixth? already? oh, Jesus, depressing) as she'd vowed she would. "Rain or shine, sickness or health, till death do us part. I vow." Not even a seizure of the San Andreas Fault could dissuade Gladys in such a mood. "You're mine. You look like me. No one is going to steal you from me, Norma Jeane, like my other daughters."

These triumphant, terrible words Norma Jeane did not hear, did not hear, did not, blown away by the rushing wind.

This day, this birthday, would be the first that Norma Jeane would remember clearly. This wonderful day with Gladys who was sometimes Mother, or Mother who was sometimes Gladys. A slender darting bird of a woman with sharp prowling eyes and a self-described "raptor's smile" and elbows that jabbed you in the ribs if you got too close. Exhaling luminous smoke from her nostrils like curving elephant tusks so you dared not call her by any name, above all not "Mama" or "Mommy" – those "pukey-cute titles" that Gladys had long ago forbidden–or even look at her too intensely – "Don't squint at me, you! No close-ups. Unless I'm prepared." At such times Gladys's edgy brittle laugh was the sound an ice pick makes stabbing into blocks of ice. This day of revelation Norma Jeane would recall through her life of thirty-six years, sixty-three days, which was to be a life outlived

by Gladys as a doll baby might be fitted snug inside a larger doll ingeniously hollowed out for that purpose. Did I want any other happiness? No, just to be with her. Maybe to cuddle a little and sleep in her bed with her if she'd let me. I loved her so. In fact, there was evidence that Norma Jeane had been with her mother on other birthdays of hers, at least Norma Jeane's first birthday, though Norma Jeane could not recall except by way of snapshots – HAPPY 1ST BIRTHDAY BABY NORMA JEANE! – a hand-lettered paper banner draped like a bathing beauty's sash around the blinking damp-eyed infant with the chubby-cute moon face, dimpled cheeks, curly dark-blond hair, and satin ribbons drooping in the hair; like old dreams these snapshots were blurred and creased, taken evidently by a man friend; there was a very young very pretty though feverish-looking Gladys in bobbed hair, kiss curls, and bee-stung lips like Clara Bow gripping her twelve-month infant "Norma Jeane" stiff on her lap as you might grip an object breakable and precious, with awe if not with visible pleasure, with steely pride if not with love, the date scrawled on the backs of these several snapshots June 1, 1927. But six-year-old Norma Jeane possessed no more memory of that occasion than she had of being born – wanting to ask Gladys or Grandma, How do you be born, was that something you did yourself? – to her mother in a charity lying-in ward at the Los Angeles County General Hospital after twenty-two hours of "unremitting hell" (as Gladys spoke of the ordeal) or carried in Gladys's "special pouch" beneath her heart for eight months, eleven days. She could not remember! Yet, thrilled to be staring at these snapshots whenever Gladys was in a mood to display them tumbled across whatever bedspread atop whatever bed of Gladys's in whatever rental "residence," she never doubted that the infant in the snapshot was her as all through my life I would know of myself through the witnessing and naming of others. As Jesus in the Gospels is only seen and spoken of and recorded by others. I would know my existence and the value of that existence through others' eyes, which I believed I could trust as I could not trust my own.

Gladys was glancing at her daughter, whom she hadn't seen in – well, months. Saying sharply, "Don't be so nervous. Don't squint as if I'm going to crash this car in the next minute, you'll make yourself need glasses and that's the end for you. And try not to squirm like a little snake needing to pee. I never taught you such bad habits. I don't intend to crash this car, if that's what you're worried about, like your ridiculous old grandma. I promise." Gladys cast a sidelong glance at the child, chiding yet seductive, for that was Gladys's way: she pushed you off, she drew you in; now saying in a husky lowered voice, "Say: Mo-ther has a birthday surprise for you. Waiting up ahead."

"A s-surprise?"

Gladys sucked in her cheeks, smiling as she drove.

"W-where are we going, M-mother?"

Happiness so acute it was broken glass in Norma Jeane's mouth.

Even in warm humid weather, Gladys wore stylish black-net gloves to protect her sensitive skin. Gaily she thumped both gloved hands against the steering wheel. "Where are we going? Listen to you. As if you've never been in your mother's Hollywood residence before."

Norma Jeane smiled in confusion. Trying to think. Had she? The implication seemed to be that Norma Jeane had forgotten something essential, that this was a betrayal of a kind, a disappointment. Yet it seemed Gladys moved frequently. Sometimes she informed Della and sometimes not. Her life was complicated and mysterious. There were problems with landlords and fellow tenants; there were "money" problems and "maintenance" problems. The previous winter, a brief violent earthquake in an area of Hollywood in which Gladys lived had left her homeless for two weeks, forced to live with friends and out of touch completely with Della. Always, however, Gladys lived in Hollywood. Or West Hollywood. Her work at The Studio demanded it. Because she was a "contract employee" at The Studio (The Studio was the largest movie production company in Hollywood, therefore in the world, boasting more stars under contract "than there are stars in the constellations"), her life didn't belong to her – "The way Catholic nuns are 'brides of Christ.'" Gladys had had to board out her daughter since Norma Jeane was an infant of only twelve days, mostly with the child's grandmother, for five dollars a week plus expenses, it was a damned hard life, it was grueling, it was sad, but what choice had she, working such long hours at The Studio, sometimes a double shift, at her boss's "beckon-call" – how could she possibly take on the care and burden of a young child?

"I dare anyone to judge me. Unless he's in my shoes. Or she. Yes, she!"

Gladys spoke with mysterious vehemence. It may have been her own mother, Della, with whom she was feuding.

2.5. Ian McEwan. *Atonement* (2001)

Ian McEwan was born in 1948 in Aldershot, Hampshire, England. He graduated from Sussex University in 1970 with a degree in English literature. As a professional writer, he also produced works for television, radio and film. McEwan is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Society of Arts, a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among his most prestigious literary awards, there are several British Book Awards as the Author of the Year and for the Book of the Year, Somerset Maugham Award (1976), the 2001 Whitbread Novel Award, several James Tait Black Memorial Prizes, the 1999 Shakespeare Prize and the Booker Prize for fiction in 1998 (with numerous nominations, being long- and shortlisted).

McEwan got a nickname of "Ian Macabre" and "enfant terrible" of English literature for his interest in the claustrophobic tales of childhood, deviant sexuality and disjointed family life. These and other grim experiments appeared in his first short-story collections *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) and *In Between the Sheets* (1978). He took his exploration of mundane horrors into his novels *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) and *Black Dogs* (1992). For example, *The Cement Garden* tells the story of four children, who, when their mother dies, bury her in cement in the basement, as in their isolation they do not know what to do in such cases. However, the horror of the everyday develops into uncontrolled and perverted "family" life. Violence and obsession are scrupulously depicted in *The Comfort of Strangers*, and the irretrievable loss of a child in the supermarket – in *The Child in Time* (1987).

The writer also turned to history, and in *Black Dogs* (1992), alongside a few inexplicable and mystical happenings, he revisited the events in Nazi death camps, the post-war France and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. *Enduring Love* (1997) is a typical neuronovel and the novel of consciousness, where McEwan uncovers erotomania. *Amsterdam* (1998) highlights the issue of euthanasia, while *Atonement* (2001) explores the subject of truth, witnessing, guilt and ir/reparability of falsehoods. This novel was adapted for the screen (2007). *Saturday* (2005) is another neuronovel providing an aesthetic debate about the role of genes and arts in the functioning of human consciousness.

The 21st-century problems in McEwan's novels include sexual suppression and abuse (*On Chesil Beach*, 2007), involvement in political games and wrong love affairs (*Sweet Tooth*, 2012), tragedies of radical religious beliefs (*The Children Act*, 2014) and artificial intelligence (*Machines Like Me*, 2019).

This is how a critic describes the general stylistic peculiarity of McEwan's fiction: "McEwan's novels are eclectic in theme and subject but there is a persistent element that can best be described as tectonic, a sense of two strata or planes of existence coming together, perhaps through an accident, with consequences that are numinous with significance but rarely explained" [10, p. 18].

The novel *Atonement* was published in 2001. This complex and multilayered story involves the destinies of several main characters. Briony Tallis, the teenager of an aristocratic family, an imaginative and highly sensitive girl who practices composing literary works early in her life, becomes an involuntary witness of several romantic and intimate scenes between her sister Cecilia and the house gardener's son, Robby Turner, whose education is subsidized by the Tallises. Another unfortunate incident when the visiting cousin Lola is raped by another guest, Paul Marshall, leads the naïve Briony to a false testimony against Robby. The Second World War disrupts the habitual flow of life of all the characters. Instead of continuing to serve his erroneous sentence, Robby goes to fight. And the Tallis sisters, never

close again, become nurses in London military hospitals – the occupation Briony takes up to atone for her irreparable guilt. There are two endings to this dramatic plot: the happy and the unhappy one. While the happy ending is contained in the 70-year-old Briony's fictional account of Cecilia and Robby's destiny, the true and tragic outcome is what reality of the war holds.

Discussion

1. How is the novel's plot structured? What is the historial background of the novel?
2. In the context of the novel, what does the word "atonement" mean? How does the novel explore the issue of guilt / forgiveness?
3. Describe each of the following characters' relationship to the war:
   - Briony Tallis
   - Cecilia Tallis
   - Robbie Turner
   - Paul Marshall
4. Which historic event from WW II combat scenes is described by McEwan?
5. What is the real outcome of Cecilia and Robbie's story, and what kind of fictional alternative is presented in the novel?
6. What are the instances of stark naturalism in *Atonement*?
7. Comment on the problem of memory / tribute to the victims of the war in the novel.
8. How does the novel explore the issue of guilt / forgiveness?
9. What is the role / mission of fiction writing when reversing history is impossible?
10. Which scenes / moments in the novel do you personally find most enlightening / emotionally strong / important for understanding the key ideas?

In these episodes, some war scenes are presented in often shocking detail. Comment on the degree of realism and the problems highlighted in these excerpts.

a) The road no longer had the protection of the plane trees. Vulnerable to attack and without shade, it uncoiled across the undulating land in long shallow S shapes. He had wasted precious reserves in unnecessary talk and encounters.

Tiredness had made him superficially elated and forthcoming. Now he reduced his progress to the rhythm of his boots – he walked across the land until he came to the sea. Everything that impeded him had to be outweighed, even if only by a fraction, by all that drove him on. In one pan of the scales, his wound, thirst, the blister, tiredness, the heat, the aching in his feet and legs, the Stukas, the distance, the Channel; in the other, I'll wait for you, and the memory of when she had said it, which he had come to treat like a sacred site. Also, the fear of capture. His most sensual memories – their few minutes in the library, the kiss in Whitehall – were bleached colourless through overuse. He knew by heart certain passages from her letters, he had revisited their tussle with the vase by the fountain, he remembered the warmth from her arm at the dinner when the twins went missing. These memories sustained him, but not so easily. Too often they reminded him of where he was when he last summoned them. They lay on the far side of a great divide in time, as significant as B.C. and A.D. Before prison, before the war, before the sight of a corpse became a banality.

b) She scrubbed her hands and was set another task. Everything was different for her now she had achieved one small thing. She was set to taking water around to the soldiers who had collapsed with battle exhaustion. It was important that they did not dehydrate. Come on now, Private Carter. Drink this and you can go back to sleep. Sit up now . . . She held a little white enamel teapot and let them suck the water from its spout while she cradled their filthy heads against her apron, like giant babies. She scrubbed down again, and did a bedpan round. She had never minded it less. She was told to attend to a soldier with stomach wounds who had also lost a part of his nose. She could see through the bloody cartilage into his mouth, and onto the back of his lacerated tongue. Her job was to clean up his face. Again, it was oil and sand which had been blasted into the skin. He was awake, she guessed, but he kept his eyes closed. Morphine had calmed him, and he swayed slightly from side to side, as though in time to music in his head. As his features began to appear from behind the mask of black, she thought of those books of glossy blank pages she had in childhood which she rubbed with a blunt pencil to make a picture appear. She thought too how one of these men might be Robbie, how she would dress his wounds without knowing who he was, and with cotton wool tenderly rub his face until his familiar features emerged, and how he would turn to her with gratitude, realize who she was, and take her hand, and in silently squeezing it, forgive her. Then he would let her settle him down into sleep.

c) There were horrors enough, but it was the unexpected detail that threw him and afterwards would not let him go. When they reached the level crossing, after a five kilometre walk along a narrow road, he saw the path he was looking for meandering off to the right, then dipping and rising towards a copse that

covered a low hill to the north-west. They stopped so that he could consult the map. But it wasn't where he thought it should be. It wasn't in his pocket, or tucked into his belt. Had he dropped it, or put it down at the last stop? He let his greatcoat fall on the ground and was reaching inside his jacket when he realized. The map was in his left hand and must have been there for over an hour. He glanced across at the other two but they were facing away from him, standing apart, smoking silently. It was still in his hand, and he had prised it from the dead hand of a captain in the West Kents lying in a ditch outside – outside where? The rear area maps were rare. He also took the captain's revolver. He wasn't trying to impersonate an officer. He had simply lost his rifle and intended to survive.

d) The path he was interested in started down the side of a bombed house, fairly new, perhaps a railwayman's cottage rebuilt after the last time. There were animal tracks in the mud surrounding a puddle in a tyre rut. Probably goats. Scattered around were shreds of striped cloth with blackened edges, remains of curtains or clothing, and a smashed-in window frame draped across a bush, and everywhere, the smell of damp soot. This was their path, their short cut. He folded the map away, and as he straightened from picking up the coat and was slinging it around his shoulders, he saw it. The others, sensing his movement, turned round, and followed his gaze. It was a leg in a tree. A mature plane tree, only just in leaf. The leg was twenty feet up, wedged in the first forking of the trunk, bare, severed cleanly above the knee. From where they stood there was no sign of blood or torn flesh. It was a perfect leg, pale, smooth, small enough to be a child's. The way it was angled in the fork, it seemed to be on display, for their benefit or enlightenment: this is a leg.

The two corporals made a dismissive sound of disgust and picked up their stuff. They refused to be drawn in. In the past few days they had seen enough.

Nettle, the lorry driver, took out another cigarette and said, 'So, which way, Guv'nor?'

They called him that to settle the difficult matter of rank. He set off down the path in a hurry, almost at a half run. He wanted to get ahead, out of sight, so that he could throw up, or crap, he didn't know which. Behind a barn, by a pile of broken slates, his body chose the first option for him. He was so thirsty, he couldn't afford to lose the fluid. He drank from his canteen, and walked around the barn. He made use of this moment alone to look at his wound. It was on his right side, just below his ribcage, about the size of a half-crown. It wasn't looking so bad after he washed away the dried blood yesterday. Though the skin around it was red, there wasn't much swelling. But there was something in there. He could feel it move when he walked. A piece of shrapnel perhaps.

By the time the corporals caught up, he had tucked his shirt back in and was pretending to study the map. In their company the map was his only privacy.

'What's the hurry?'

'He's seen some crumpet.'

'It's the map. He's having his fucking doubts again.'

'No doubts, gentlemen. This is our path.'

He took out a cigarette and Corporal Mace lit it for him. Then, to conceal the trembling in his hands, Robbie walked on, and they followed him, as they had followed him for two days now. Or was it three? He was lower in rank, but they followed and did everything he suggested, and to preserve their dignity, they teased him. When they tramped the roads or cut across the fields and he was silent for too long, Mace would say, 'Guv'nor, are you thinking about crumpet again?' And Nettle would chant, 'He fucking is, he fucking is.' They were townies who disliked the countryside and were lost in it. The compass points meant nothing to them. That part of basic training had passed them by. They had decided that to reach the coast, they needed him. It was difficult for them. He acted like an officer, but he didn't even have a single stripe. On the first night, when they were sheltering a while in the bike shed of a burnt-out school, Corporal Nettle said, 'What's a private soldier like you doing talking like a toff?'

He didn't owe them explanations. He intended to survive and he didn't care whether they tagged along or not. Both men had hung on to their rifles. That was something at least, and Mace was a big man, strong across the shoulders, and with hands that could have spanned two octaves of the pub piano he said he played. Nor did Robbie mind about the taunts. All he wanted now as they followed the path away from the road was to forget about the leg. Their path joined a track which ran between two stone walls and dropped down into a valley that had not been visible from the road. At the bottom was a brown stream which they crossed on stepping stones set deep in a carpet of what looked like miniature water parsley. Their route swung to the west as they rose out of the valley, still between the ancient walls. Ahead of them the sky was beginning to clear a little and glowed like a promise. Everywhere else was grey. As they approached the top through a copse of chestnut trees, the lowering sun dropped below the cloud cover and caught the scene, dazzling the three soldiers as they rose into it. How fine it might have been, to end a day's ramble in the French countryside, walking into the setting sun. Always a hopeful act.

As they came out of the copse they heard bombers, so they went back in and smoked while they waited under the trees. From where they were they could not see the planes, but the view was fine. These were hardly hills that spread so expansively before them. They were ripples in the landscape, faint echoes of vast upheavals elsewhere. Each successive ridge was paler than the one before. He saw a receding wash of grey and blue fading in a haze towards the setting sun, like something oriental on a dinner plate.

They were making a long traverse across a deeper slope that edged further to the north and delivered them at last to another valley, another little stream. This one had a more confident flow and they crossed it by a stone bridge thick with cow dung. The corporals, who were not as tired as he was, had a lark, pretending to be

revolted. One of them threw a dried lump of dung at his back. Robbie did not turn round. The scraps of cloth, he was beginning to think, might have been a child's pyjamas. A boy's. The dive-bombers sometimes came over not long after dawn. He was trying to push it away, but it would not let him go. A French boy asleep in his bed. Robbie needed to put more distance between himself and that bombed cottage. It was not only the German army and air force pursuing him now. If there had been a moon he would have been happy walking all night. The corporals wouldn't like it. Perhaps it was time to shake them off.

Downstream of the bridge was a line of poplars whose tops fluttered brilliantly in the last of the light. They turned in the other direction and soon the track was a path again and was leaving the stream. They wound and squeezed their way through bushes with fat shiny leaves. There were also stunted oaks, barely in leaf. The vegetation underfoot smelled sweet and damp, and he thought there must be something wrong with the place to make it so different from anything they had seen.

Ahead of them was the hum of machinery. It grew louder, angrier, and suggested the high velocity spin of flywheels or electric turbines turning at impossible speed. They were entering a great hall of sound and power.

'Bees!' he called out. He had to turn and say it again before they heard him. The air was already darker. He knew the lore well enough. If one stuck in your hair and stung you, it sent out a chemical message as it died and all who received it were compelled to come and sting and die at the same place. General conscription! After all the danger, this was a kind of insult. They lifted their greatcoats over their heads and ran on through the swarm. Still among the bees, they reached a stinking ditch of slurry which they crossed by a wobbling plank. They came up behind a barn where it was suddenly peaceful. Beyond it was a farmyard. As soon as they were in it, dogs were barking and an old woman was running towards them flapping her hands at them, as though they were hens she could shoo away. The corporals depended on Robbie's French. He went forward and waited for her to reach him. There were stories of civilians selling bottles of water for ten francs, but he had never seen it. The French he had met were generous, or otherwise lost to their own miseries. The woman was frail and energetic. She had a gnarled, man-in-the-moon face and a wild look. Her voice was sharp.

'C'est impossible, M'sieu. Vous ne pouvez pas rester ici.'

'We'll be staying in the barn. We need water, wine, bread, cheese and anything else you can spare.'

'Impossible!'

He said to her softly, 'We've been fighting for France.'

'You can't stay here.'

'We'll be gone at dawn. The Germans are still . . .'

'It's not the Germans, M'sieu. It's my sons. They are animals. And they'll be back soon.'

Robbie pushed past the woman and went to the pump which was in the corner of the yard, near the kitchen. Nettle and Mace followed him. While he drank, a girl of about ten and an infant brother holding her hand watched him from the doorway. When he finished and had filled his canteen he smiled at them and they fled. The corporals were under the pump together, drinking simultaneously. The woman was suddenly behind him, clutching at his elbow. Before she could start again he said, 'Please bring us what I asked for or we'll come in and get it for ourselves.'

'My sons are brutes. They'll kill me.'

He would have preferred to say, So be it, but instead he walked away and called over his shoulder, 'I'll talk to them.'

'And then, M'sieu, they will kill you. They will tear you to shreds.'

Corporal Mace was a cook in the same RASC unit as Corporal Nettle. Before he joined he was a warehouseman at Heal's in the Tottenham Court Road. He said he knew a thing or two about comfort and in the barn he set about arranging their quarters. Robbie would have thrown himself down on the straw. Mace found a heap of sacks and with Nettle's help stuffed them to make up three mattresses. He made headboards out of hay bales which he lifted down with a single hand. He set up a door on brick piles for a table. He took out half a candle from his pocket. 'Might as well be comfy,' he kept saying under his breath. It was the first time they had moved much beyond sexual innuendo. The three men lay on their beds, smoking and waiting. Now they were no longer thirsty their thoughts were on the food they were about to get and they heard each other's stomachs rumbling and squirting in the gloom, and it made them laugh. Robbie told them about his conversation with the old woman and what she had said about her sons.

'Fifth columnists, they would be,' Nettle said. He only looked small alongside his friend, but he had a small man's sharp features. He had a friendly, rodent look, heightened by his way of resting the teeth of his upper jaw on his lower lip.

'Or French Nazis. German sympathizers. Like we got Mosley,' Mace said.

They were silent for a while, then Mace added, 'Or like they all are in the country, bonkers from marrying too close.'

'Whatever it is,' Robbie said, 'I think you should check your weapons now and have them handy.'

They did as they were told. Mace lit the candle, and they went through the routines. Robbie checked his pistol and put it within reach. When the corporals were finished, they propped the Lee-Enfields against a wooden crate and lay down on their beds again. Presently the girl came with a basket. She set it down by the barn door and ran away. Nettle fetched the basket and they spread out what they had on their table. A round loaf of brown bread, a small piece of soft cheese, an onion and a bottle of wine. The bread was hard to cut and tasted of mould. The cheese was good, but it was gone in seconds. They passed the bottle around and soon that was gone too. So they chewed on the musty bread and ate the onion.

Nettle said, 'I wouldn't give this to my fucking dog.'

'I'll go across,' Robbie said, 'and get something better.'

'We'll come too.'

But for a while they lay back on their beds in silence. No one felt like confronting the old lady just yet.

Then, at the sound of footsteps they turned and saw two men standing in the entrance. They each held something in their hands, a club perhaps, or a shotgun. In the fading light it was not possible to tell. Nor could they see the faces of the French brothers.

The voice was soft. 'Bonsoir, Messieurs.'

'Bonsoir.'

As Robbie got up from his straw bed he took the revolver. The corporals reached for their rifles. 'Go easy,' he whispered.

'Anglais? Belges?'

'Anglais.'

'We have something for you.'

'What sort of thing?'

'What's he saying?' one of the corporals said.

'He says they've got something for us.'

'Fucking hell.'

The men came a couple of steps closer and raised what was in their hands. Shotguns surely. Robbie released his safety catch. He heard Mace and Nettle do the same. 'Easy,' he murmured.

'Put away your guns, Messieurs.'

'Put away yours.'

'Wait a little moment.'

The figure who spoke was reaching into his pocket. He brought out a torch and shone it not at the soldiers, but at his brother, at what was in his hand. A French loaf. And at what was in the other hand, a canvas bag. Then he showed them the two baguettes he himself was holding.

'And we have olives, cheese, pâté, tomatoes and ham. And naturally, wine. Vive l'Angleterre.'

'Er, vive la France.'

They sat at Mace's table which the Frenchmen, Henri and Jean-Marie Bonnet, politely admired, along with the mattresses. They were short, stocky men in their fifties. Henri wore glasses, which Nettle said looked odd on a farmer. Robbie did not translate. As well as wine, they brought glass tumblers. The five men raised them in toasts to the French and British armies, and to the crushing of Germany. The brothers watched the soldiers eat. Through Robbie, Mace said that he had never tasted, never even heard of, goose liver pâté, and from now on, he would eat nothing else. The Frenchmen smiled, but their manner was constrained and they seemed in no mood to get drunk. They said they had driven all the way to a hamlet near Arras in their flatbed

farm truck to look for a young cousin and her children. A great battle had been fought for the town but they had no idea who was taking it, who was defending it or who had the upper hand. They drove on the back roads to avoid the chaos of refugees. They saw farmhouses burning, and then they came across a dozen or so dead English soldiers in the road. They had to get out and drag the men aside to avoid running over them. But a couple of the bodies were almost cut in half. It must have been a big machine gun attack, perhaps from the air, perhaps an ambush. Back in the lorry, Henri was sick in the cab, and Jean-Marie, who was at the wheel, got into a panic and drove into a ditch. They walked to a village, borrowed two horses from a farmer and pulled the Renault free. That took two hours. On the road again, they saw burnt-out tanks and armoured cars, German as well as British and French. But they saw no soldiers. The battle had moved on. By the time they reached the hamlet, it was late afternoon. The place had been completely destroyed and was deserted. Their cousin's house was smashed up, with bullet holes all over the walls, but it still had its roof. They went in every room and were relieved to find no one there. She must have taken the children and joined the thousands of people on the roads. Afraid of driving back at night, they parked in a wood and tried to sleep in the cab. All night long they heard the artillery pounding Arras. It seemed impossible that anyone, or anything, could survive there. They drove back by another route, a much greater distance, to avoid passing the dead soldiers. Now, Henri explained, he and his brother were very tired. When they shut their eyes, they saw those mutilated bodies.

Jean-Marie refilled the glasses. The account, with Robbie's running translation, had taken almost an hour. All the food was eaten. He thought about telling them of his own single, haunting detail. But he didn't want to add to the horror, and nor did he want to give life to the image while it remained at a distance, held there by wine and companionship. Instead, he told them how he was separated from his unit at the beginning of the retreat, during a Stuka attack. He didn't mention his injury. The Frenchmen might have shown concern, and he didn't want the corporals to know about it. Instead he explained how they were walking cross-country to Dunkirk to avoid the air raids along the main roads.

'We'll be back.' He said this, but he didn't believe it.

The wine was taking hold of Corporal Nettle. He began a rambling eulogy of what he called 'Frog crumpet' – how plentiful, how available, how delicious. It was all fantasy. The brothers looked at Robbie.

'He says French women are the most beautiful in the world.'

They nodded solemnly and raised their glasses.

They were all silent for a while. Their evening was almost at an end. They listened to the night sounds they had grown used to – the rumble of artillery, stray shots in the distance, a booming far-off explosion – probably sappers blowing a bridge in the retreat.

'Ask them about their mum,' Corporal Mace suggested. 'Let's get that one cleared up.'

'We were three brothers,' Henri explained. 'The eldest, Paul, her firstborn, died near Verdun in 1915. A direct hit from a shell. There was nothing to bury apart from his helmet. Us two, we were lucky. We came through without a scratch. Since then, she always hated soldiers. But now she's eighty-three and losing her mind, it's an obsession with her. French, English, Belgian, German. She makes no distinction. You're all the same to her. We worry that when the Germans come, she'll go at them with a pitchfork and they'll shoot her.'

Wearily, the brothers got to their feet. The soldiers did the same.

Jean-Marie said, 'We would offer you hospitality at our kitchen table. But to do that, we would have to lock her in her room.'

'But this has been a magnificent feast,' Robbie said.

Nettle was whispering in Mace's ear and he was nodding. Nettle took from his bag two cartons of cigarettes. Of course, it was the right thing to do. The Frenchmen made a polite show of refusing, but Nettle came round the table and shoved the gifts into their arms. He wanted Robbie to translate.

'You should have seen it, when the order came through to destroy the stores. Twenty thousand cigarettes. We took whatever we wanted.'

A whole army fleeing to the coast, armed with cigarettes to keep the hunger away.

The Frenchmen gave courteous thanks, complimented Robbie on his French, then bent over the table to pack the empty bottles and glasses into the canvas bag. There was no pretending that they would meet again.

'We'll be gone at first light,' Robbie said. 'So we'll say goodbye.'

They shook hands.

Henri Bonnet said, 'All that fighting we did twenty-five years ago. All those dead. Now the Germans are back in France. In two days they'll be here, taking everything we have. Who would have believed it?'

Robbie felt, for the first time, the full ignominy of the retreat. He was ashamed. He said, with even less conviction than before, 'We'll be back to throw them out, I promise you.'

The brothers nodded, and with final smiles of farewell, left the dim circle of the candle's glow and crossed the darkness towards the open barn door, the glasses chinking against the bottles as they went.

2.6. Richard Russo. *Empire Falls* (2001)

Richard Russo was born in Johnstown, New York, in 1949. He studied at the University of Arizona and got academic degrees (BA, MA and PhD) from there in different disciplines – Fine Arts and Philosophy. Russo taught at Southern Illinois University. For a period of time, Russo worked in construction.

In the first of his novels, *Mohawk* (1986), the setting and characters reflect a working-class town. *The Risk Pool* (1988) with the same setting explores a family issue, a father-son relationship and the eternal problem of broken families. *Nobody's Fool* (1993) explores the eccentric character, Donald Sullivan (Sully), who is a 60-year-old juvenile, haunted by his father's memory and limited by his own self-destructive behaviour. Much of Russo's work is semi-autobiographical. His 2001 novel *Empire Falls* received the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Richard Russo lives in Portland, Maine.

Empire Falls, the Pulitzer prize winning novel, is set in a small, working-class town, in Maine. Charles Beaumont Whiting, whose ancestral dynasty has ruled the town of Empire Falls for generations (owend the shirt factory, the textile mill), no longer upholds the town‘s economic status in the narrative present, which is full of hardships for the citizens: the town is decaying and almost bankrupt. The manager of the Empire Grill, Miles Roby, encounters numerous personal issues: divorce from his wife, his teenage daughter's love and romance problems, his very unpleasant and rascally father and his marijuana smoking brother, a cook at the Empire Grill. In addition, there are past events from Miles's family history that keep plaguing his present life.

The themes explored in this novel include economic necessity, the rich and the powerful and their exploitation of those who are less fortunate, love of one's children, the choice between self-realization and self-sacrifice, as well as the philosophical problem of how much is determined by free will and how much by nature. Besides, the novel is written in an enjoyable humorous mode, which exposes the unsavoury side of southern morals and ethics, including the legacy of slavery. The novel also depicts the relationship between the past and the present, and people's responsibility for the past events.

Discussion

1. What similarities does this novel have with other works by R. Russo?
2. What social issues are discussed in the manner of the traditional realist fiction? Does the author express any attitude to the social problems depicted?
3. In the town of Empire Falls, the local community becomes to degrade when the town's major industries become obsolete. Comment on the population before and after these events.
4. Divide the characters into social classes or groups. What is their role in the society of Empire Falls? They are: Candace Burke, Charlene Gardiner, Bea Majeski, Father Mark, Otto Meyer, Jr., Jimmy Minty, Zack Minty, Peter, Christina Roby, David Roby, Grace Roby, Janine Roby, Max

Roby, Miles Roby, Tick Roby, Doris Roderigue, Father Tom, John Voss, Horace Weymouth, Charles Beaumont Whiting, Cindy Whiting, Francine Whiting.

5. Make a character profile of Miles Roby. Is he guided by any principles in his behaviour?
6. Who do these words belong to: "Lives are rivers. We imagine we can direct their paths, though in the end there's but one destination, and we end up being true to ourselves only because we have no choice"? Comment on their meaning concerning the personality of the speaker.
7. How effectively does the author use humour in the novel?
8. Comment on the novel's title.
9. Does the novel's main idea bear any similarity with the classical works of realist fiction (industrial novels)?

The excerpts below present a) a picture of one of the properties in Empire Falls: comment of the changes that have occurred over time; b) the portrait of Janine Roby: what kind of change is taking place within this character and how does it affect her life?

a) The house he grew up in on Long Street had been on the market for more than a year, and Miles was parked across the street, trying to imagine what sort of person would purchase it in its present condition. The side porch, dangerous with rot even when he was a boy, had been removed but not replaced; visible evidence of where it had been wrenched away remained in four ugly, unpainted scars. Anybody who left the house by the back door, the only one Miles had ever used, would now be greeted by a six-foot drop into a patch of poisonous-looking weeds and rusted hubcaps. The rest of the structure was gray with age and neglect, its front porch sloping crazily in several different directions, as if the house had been built on a fissure. Even the FOR SALE sign on the terrace tilted.

Several different families had rented the house since his mother's death, none of them, apparently, interested in preventing or even forestalling its decline. Of course, to be fair, Miles had to admit that the decline had begun under the Robys' own stewardship. On what had once been a tidy, middle-class street, theirs and the Minty place next door were the first houses to prefigure the deterioration of the whole neighborhood. Miles's father, though a sometime house painter, had been isinclined to paint any house he himself happened to be living in. Summers he was busy working on the coast, and by October he would pronounce himself "all painted out," though he sometimes could be induced to work for a week or so if the landlord – with whom they had a reduced-rent arrangement contingent upon Max's keeping the house

painted and in good repair—complained or threatened eviction. Resentful of such a strict literal interpretation of their agreement, Max retaliated by painting the house half a dozen different, largely incompatible colors from the numerous leftover, half-empty cans he'd appropriated from his various summer jobs. The Roby cellar was always full of stacked gallon cans, their lids slightly askew, the damp, rotting shelves full of open mason jars of turpentine, the fumes from which permeated the upstairs throughout the winter. Miles was in fourth grade when one of his friends asked what it was like to live in the joke house, a remark he passed along not to his father, who was responsible for its harlequin appearance, but to his mother, who first flushed crimson, then looked as if she might burst into tears, then ran into her bedroom, slammed the door and did. Later, red-eyed, she explained to Miles that what was on the inside of a house (love, she seemed to have in mind) was more important than what was on the outside (paint, preferably in one hue), but after Miles went to bed he heard his parents arguing, and after that night Max never painted the house again. Now its motley color scheme had weathered into uniform gray.

66 99 b) When Janine finished her last aerobics class, she showered quickly and drove over to the Empire Grill, circling the block to make sure Miles wasn't there. Even though the divorce was dragging on forever, the whole thing had been amicable enough. In fact, she'd liked Miles better these last nine months since they'd decided to separate than at any time in the previous twenty years. Still, she had no desire to see him right now, especially not in the company of her fiancé. It was genuinely weird the way Walt had begun hanging out at the grill, a place he'd totally avoided when they were sneaking around.

Pulling in and parking next to Walt's van, she made a point of not looking at the stenciled logo, not wanting to admit that it was beginning to irritate her. THE SILVER FOX. What sort of man would write that on his car? For Janine this question was neither idle nor rhetorical. She was going to marry Walt Comeau as soon as the divorce was final, and part of her wanted to know the answer to that question before she became half owner of the vehicle and sole owner of the driver.

Then again, some questions were better left unanswered. She knew Walt pretty well, certainly better than she'd known Miles. Back when they got married, she hadn't even known who she was, her own self, never mind her intended. At least now Janine knew who Janine was, what Janine wanted, and, just as important, what Janine didn't want. She didn't want Miles, or anyone who reminded her of Miles. She didn't want to be fat anymore, either. Never, ever, again. Also, she wanted a real sex life, and she wanted to act young for a change, something she hadn't been able to do when she actually was young. She wanted to dance and have men look at her. She liked the way her body felt after dropping all that weight, and by God she liked to come. For Janine, at forty, orgasms were a new thing and she damn near lost her mind every time she had another, or when she contemplated how close she'd come

to going her whole life without experiencing that singular, incomparable, tingling, explosive, mind-bending thrill. The first one had so caught her by surprise that at the height of the wave she went someplace very far away, then returned, sobbing in Walt's arms, having concluded she'd never get to go there again, though he assured her she would and then made sure that she did. Damn, she remembered thinking. I mean, DAMN.

It was Walt Comeau who'd taught her about herself and her body's needs, though she was beginning to realize that even Walt's views on the matter were oversimplified. To his way of thinking, what her body needed was lots of exercise and lots of Walt. Janine herself was wondering if her body might not benefit from a little travel. She didn't mind working out at Walt's own club, but she'd read somewhere about a spa out in the desert near Tucson, Arizona, that specialized in women's bodies. "Luxurious" was the word the brochure used, and now that Janine was beginning to feel luxurious about her body she thought she deserved a week or two at a place like that. It was expensive, sure, but Walt was always going on about all his money, and she kept hoping to talk him into honeymooning there. And once Tick graduated from high school, what would prevent them from relocating to a warmer climate? After living in Maine all her life, it'd be nice to be someplace where the sun came out and stayed out. Walt was always talking about opening up a new health club, so why not Sedona or Santa Fe? If what she heard was true, the desert Southwest was like California. People kept fit and healthy and wore bathing suits that were basically symbolic of clothing. If Walt didn't want to at least check it out, Janine wouldn't mind going by herself for a week. She'd liked the look of the Latino masseurs in the brochure. Which seemed a little ungrateful, she had to admit. After all, Walt had been the one who woke her up, who helped her locate herself, the person she really was. And he also located that wonderful spot, found it right away, the one Miles never suspected the existence of. Now here she was thinking about Latino masseurs.

If only he just hadn't stenciled those stupid words on the side of the van, Janine thought as she got out of her Blazer. Probably "stupid" wasn't the right spin. They weren't stupid so much as boastful, she decided, heading for the front door of the restaurant. Besides, wasn't it Walt's cockiness that had attracted her in the first place? The fact that he was so different from Miles, who was so docile? Her mother, of course, still loved Miles and sided with him on all occasions, referring to Walt as "that little banty rooster." "Miles is modest for good reason, Ma, believe me," she assured her mother. A mean thing to say, maybe, but true, and it hinted at what there was no way to discuss with Bea – the whole sex thing. Her mother, Janine felt certain, was one of those poor women who'd managed to do what Janine herself had damn near done. She'd lived her entire adult life from one end to the other without a single orgasm. When Bea died, it would be possible to say truthfully that she went before she came. Not Janine. If she'd been the sort of person to stencil anything on

the side of a van, it'd be something more like, SHE CAME BEFORE SHE WENT. Which meant, she supposed, that she and Walt Comeau were made for each other, and she ought to quit thinking about the strong hands of Latino masseurs.

"Hey, babe," she said, sliding onto a stool next to the man she'd be married to next month, if her idiot lawyer was to be believed. Unless the roof of the Fairhaven courthouse fell in too, which wouldn't surprise Janine one bit, not the way everything had been conspiring against her right from the start, when she made the mistake of telling that priest with the Alzheimer's all about herself and Walt, figuring he'd forgive her and then forget all about it. Everyone said he couldn't remember twice around, which was why they'd finally had to hire the younger priest. Except that this time the old guy remembered three or four times around. He told Miles everything she'd said in the confessional and then, forgetting he'd told him, told him again the next day.

Still, now that it was almost over, Janine figured it was probably just as well the old nitwit had squealed on her. At the time she'd been confused about what she wanted, or else she wouldn't have gone to a priest at all. Once everything was out in the open, it occurred to her that what she wanted was Walt and for the two of them to make up for all the sex she'd been cheated out of. If that meant everybody thought she was a slut, including her daughter and her own mother, then they could just think whatever they wanted. In a sense it was good she and Walt got caught, because if they hadn't, Walt, being a man, probably would've been just as happy to keep on with the hanky-panky. It was Janine who hadn't liked all the sneaking around, and getting caught had at least set the legal ball rolling, which was something. Keeping it rolling had required all her energy, except for what she kept in reserve for sex and the Stairmaster. The last nine months had proved one thing beyond a shadow of a doubt: you can't beat city hall the same year its roof falls in.

2.7. Jonathan Safran Foer. *Everything is Illuminated* (2002)

Jonathan Safran Foer was born in Washington, D. C. His mother's roots go back to Poland, as her father was a Holocaust survivor. Foer studied at Princeton University, where he was a disciple of the famous American writer Joyce Carol Oates. He was always interested in his Jewish origins and history (some of the events and facts in the novel *Everything is Illuminated* are based on the life of his grandfather). He also traveled to Ukraine.

The most significant of Foer's literary prizes include the National Jewish Book Award (2001), the Guardian First Book Award (2002), the New York Public Library's Young Lions Fiction Award (2003).

Foer's next novel *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) was based on the events od 9/11. In it, a young boy is dealing with the trauma of loss of his father, a victim of the terrorist attack. The style of this novel was characterized as "visual writing". Different plot-lines are mixed with rather odd photos, making the novel extremely original.

A university teacher of creative writing, Foer makes his living as a professional author of fiction, too. His other novels are *Tree of Codes* (2010) and *Here I am* (2016).

Foer is also known as a public thinker, who, in his non-fiction, raises burning and universally significant topics: attitude to animals, vegetarianism, climate change, humanitarian concerns and other.

Everything is Illuminated (2002) is one of most wildly experimental novels in literature. There are two intertwined life stories: the fictionalized history of the town of Trachimbrod, non-existent at the time of the narration, a Jewish shtetl in Poland/Ukraine which became a ghetto during the Holocaust, and the second story is about the author as the novel's character, and his trip to Ukraine to discover the history of Trachimbrod.

The tragic part of the shtetl's war history is the extermination of several thousand Jews; while the novel's humour is constructed out of numerous elements: the clumsy and incongruous style of writing of the Ukrainian youth Alex, who corresponds with Foer (the hero); the mythical history of Trachimbrod and its citizens, their amusing and sometimes weird traditions, their eccentric personalities (both allegedly factual and fictional).

Some of the most amusing episodes describe Foer's visit to the Soviet Union which is on the verge of collapsing, in order to discover the place where the shtetl used to be. The eccentric company consisting of Foer, Alex (his translator and eventually good friend), Alex's grandfather and his "deranged seeing-eye bitch", Sammy Davis, Jr., Jr. Eventually, the store reveals the heart-breaking collection of little things that one of the survivors managed to preserve throughout all these years.

Discussion

1. How many plot lines can you identify in the novel? Give a brief account of each one.
2. When you put together all the pieces of the narrative, what kind of life story do we get?
3. In your opinion, why does the author use such different narrative modes: magic realism, black humour, historically precise records, imitation, etc.?

4. Collect information about these characters:
   - Jonathan
   - Alex
   - Grandfather
   - Brod
   - Trachim B.
   - Sofiowka N
   - Safran
   - Lista
5. Which episodes in the novel are most dramatic? Explain your choice.
6. Many of the chapters are titled "Falling in Love". There are many kinds of love in the novel. How are they similar or different from each other?
7. What does the title of the novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, mean?
8. How would you characterize the style of the novel?
9. Do you consider the ending of the book hopeful or tragic? Why?
10. Make a list of essential ideas expressed in the novel. What literary techniques does the author use to get these ideas across to the readers?

These episodes describe two temporal layers in the novel: the present time of the narration (an account of the Ukrainian boy Alex), and the tragic scene from the Second World War, when the Nazis destroyed a Jewish shtetl. What unites these scenes? What effect is achieved by their different tonality?

a) An Overture to the Commencement of a Very Rigid Journey

My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my many friends dub me Alex, because that is a more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name. Mother dubs me Alexi-stop-spleening-me!, because I am always spleening her. If you want to know why I am always spleening her, it is because I am always elsewhere with friends, and disseminating so much currency, and performing so many things that can spleen a mother. Father used to dub me Shapka, for the fur hat I would don even in the summer month. He ceased dubbing me that because I ordered him to cease dubbing me that. It sounded boyish to me, and I have always thought of myself as very potent and generative. I have many many girls, believe me, and they all have a different name for me. One dubs me Baby, not because I am a baby, but because she attends to me. Another dubs me All Night. Do you want to know why? I have a girl who dubs me Currency, because I disseminate so much currency around her. She licks my chops for it. I have a miniature brother who dubs me Alli. I do not dig this name very much, but I dig him very much, so OK, I permit him to dub me Alli. As for his name, it is Little Igor, but Father dubs him Clumsy One, because he is always

promenading into things. It was only four days previous that he made his eye blue from a mismanagement with a brick wall. If you're wondering what my bitch's name is, it is Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior. She has this name because Sammy Davis, Junior was Grandfather's beloved singer, and the bitch is his, not mine, because I am not the one who thinks he is blind.

As for me, I was sired in 1977, the same year as the hero of this story. In truth, my life has been very ordinary. As I mentioned before, I do many good things with myself and others, but they are ordinary things. I dig American movies. I dig Negroes, particularly Michael Jackson. I dig to disseminate very much currency at famous nightclubs in Odessa. Lamborghini Countaches are excellent, and so are cappuccinos. Many girls want to be carnal with me in many good arrangements, notwithstanding the Inebriated Kangaroo, the Gorky Tickle, and the Unyielding Zookeeper. If you want to know why so many girls want to be with me, it is because I am a very premium person to be with. I am homely, and also severely funny, and these are winning things. But nonetheless, I know many people who dig rapid cars and famous discotheques. There are so many who perform the Sputnik Bosom Dalliance – which is always terminated with a slimy underface – that I cannot tally them on all of my hands. There are even many people named Alex. (Three in my house alone!) That is why I was so effervescent to go to Lutsk and translate for Jonathan Safran Foer. It would be unordinary.

I had performed recklessly well in my second year of English at university. This was a very majestic thing I did because my instructor was having shit between his brains. Mother was so proud of me, she said, "Alexi-stop-spleening-me! You have made me so proud of you." I inquired her to purchase me leather pants, but she said no. "Shorts?" "No." Father was also so proud. He said, "Shapka," and I said, "Do not dub me that," and he said, "Alex, you have made Mother so proud."

Mother is a humble woman. Very, very humble. She toils at a small café one hour distance from our home. She presents food and drink to customers there, and says to me, "I mount the autobus for an hour to work all day doing things I hate. You want to know why? It is for you, Alexi-stop-spleening-me! One day you will do things for me that you hate. That is what it means to be a family." What she does not clutch is that I already do things for her that I hate. I listen to her when she talks to me. I resist complaining about my pygmy allowance. And did I mention that I do not spleen her nearly so much as I desire to? But I do not do these things because we are a family. I do them because they are common decencies. That is an idiom that the hero taught me. I do them because I am not a big fucking asshole. That is another idiom that the hero taught me.

Father toils for a travel agency, denominated Heritage Touring. It is for Jewish people, like the hero, who have cravings to leave that ennobled country America and visit humble towns in Poland and Ukraine. Father's agency scores a translator, guide, and driver for the Jews, who try to unearth places where their families once existed. OK, I had never met a Jewish person until the voyage. But this was their

fault, not mine, as I had always been willing, and one might even write lukewarm, to meet one. I will be truthful again and mention that before the voyage I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains. This is because all I knew of Jewish people was that they paid Father very much currency in order to make vacations from America to Ukraine. But then I met Jonathan Safran Foer, and I will tell you, he is not having shit between his brains. He is an ingenious Jew.

So as for the Clumsy One, who I never ever dub the Clumsy One but always Little Igor, he is a first-rate boy. It is now evident to me that he will become a very potent and generative man, and that his brain will have many muscles. We do not speak in volumes, because he is such a silent person, but I am certain that we are friends, and I do not think I would be lying if I wrote that we are paramount friends. I have tutored Little Igor to be a man of this world. For an example, I exhibited him a smutty magazine three days yore, so that he should be appraised of the many positions in which I am carnal. "This is the sixty-nine," I told him, presenting the magazine in front of him. I put my fingers – two of them – on the action, so that he would not overlook it. "Why is it dubbed sixty-nine?" he asked, because he is a person hot on fire with curiosity. "It was invented in 1969. My friend Gregory knows a friend of the nephew of the inventor." "What did people do before 1969?" "Merely blowjobs and masticating box, but never in chorus." He will be made a VIP if I have a thing to do with it.

This is where the story begins.

But first I am burdened to recite my good appearance. I am unequivocally tall. I do not know any women who are taller than me. The women I know who are taller than me are lesbians, for whom 1969 was a very momentous year. I have handsome hairs, which are split in the middle. This is because Mother used to split them on the side when I was a boy, and to spleen her I split them in the middle. "Alexi-stop-spleening-me!," she said, "you appear mentally unbalanced with your hairs split like that." She did not intend it, I know. Very often Mother utters things that I know she does not intend. I have an aristocratic smile and like to punch people. My stomach is very strong, although it presently lacks muscles. Father is a fat man, and Mother is also. This does not disquiet me, because my stomach is very strong, even if it appears very fat. I will describe my eyes and then begin the story. My eyes are blue and resplendent. Now I will begin the story.

Father obtained a telephone call from the American office of Heritage Touring. They required a driver, guide, and translator for a young man who would be in Lutsk at the dawn of the month of July. This was a troublesome supplication, because at the dawn of July, Ukraine was to celebrate the first birthday of its ultramodern constitution, which makes us feel very nationalistic, and so many people would be on vacation in foreign places. It was an impossible situation, like the 1984 Olympics. But Father is an overawing man who always obtains what he desires. "Shapka," he said on the phone to me, who was at home enjoying the greatest of all documentary movies, The Making of "Thriller," "what was the language you studied this year at

school?" "Do not dub me Shapka," I said. "Alex," he said, "what was the language you studied this year at school?" "The language of English," I told him. "Are you good and fine at it?" he asked me. "I am fluid," I told him, hoping I might make him proud enough to buy me the zebra-skin seat coverings of my dreams. "Excellent, Shapka," he said. "Do not dub me that," I said. "Excellent, Alex. Excellent. You must nullify any plans you possess for the first week of the month of July." "I do not possess any plans," I said to him. "Yes you do," he said.

66 99 b) I implore myself to paint Trachimbrod, so you will know why we were so overawed. There was nothing. When I utter "nothing" I do not mean there was nothing except for two houses, and some wood on the ground, and pieces of glass, and children's toys, and photographs. When I utter that there was nothing, what I intend is that there was not any of these things, or any other things. "How?" the hero asked. "How?" I asked Augustine. "How could anything have ever existed here?" "It was rapid," she said, and that would have been enough for me. I would not have made another question or said another thing, and I do not think that the hero would have. But Grandfather said, "Tell him." Augustine positioned her hands so far in the pockets of her dress that it looked like she had nothing after her bends. "Tell him what happened," he said. "I do not know everything." "Tell him what you know." It was only then that I understood that "him" was me. "No," she said. "Please," he said. "No," she said. "Please." "It was all very rapid, you must understand. You ran and you could not care about what was behind you or you would stop running." "Tanks?" "One day." "One day?" "Some departed before." "Before they came?" "Yes." "But you did not." "No." "You were lucky to endure." Silence. "No." Silence. "Yes." Silence. We could have stopped it there. We could have viewed Trachimbrod, returned to the car, and followed Augustine back to her house. The hero would have been able to say that he was in Trachimbrod, he could have even said that he met Augustine, and Grandfather and I would have been able to say that we had completed our mission. But Grandfather was not content with this. "Tell him," he said. "Tell him what happened." I was not ashamed and I was not scared. I was not anything. I just desired to know what would occur next. (I do not intend what would occur in Augustine's story, but amid Grandfather and her.) "They made us in lines," she said. "They had lists. They were logical." I translated for the hero as Augustine spoke. "They burned the synagogue." "They burned the synagogue." "That was the first thing they did." "That was first." "Then they made all of the men in lines." You cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again. "And then?" Grandfather asked. "It was in the middle of the town. There," she said, and she pointed her finger into the darkness. "They unrolled a Torah in front of them. A terrible thing. My father would command us to kiss any book that touched the ground. Cooking books. Books for children. Mysteries. Plays. Novels. Even empty journals. The General went down the line and told each man to spit on the Torah or they would

kill his family." "This is not true," Grandfather said. "It is true," Augustine said, and she was not crying, which surprised me very much, but I understand now that she had found places for her melancholy that were behind more masks than only her eyes. "The first man was Yosef, who was the shoemaker. The man with a scar on his face said spit, and he held a gun to Rebecca's head. She was his daughter, and she was a good friend of mine. We used to play cards over there," she said, and pointed into the darkness, "and we told secrets about boys who we were in love with, who we wanted to marry." "Did he spit?" Grandfather asked. "He spit. And then the General said, Step on it." "Did he?" "He did." "He stepped on it," I told the hero. "Then he went to the next person in line, who was Izzy. He taught me drawing in his house, which was there," she said, and pointed her finger into the darkness. "We would remain very late, drawing, laughing. We danced, some nights, to Father's records. He was a friend of mine, and when his wife had the baby, I would care for it like it was my own. Spit, the man with blue eyes said, and he put a gun in the mouth of Izzy's wife, just like this," she said, and put her finger in her mouth. "Did he spit?" Grandfather asked. "He spit." "He spit," I told the hero. "And then the General made him curse the Torah, and this time he put the gun in Izzy's son's mouth." "Did he?" "He did. And then the General made him rip the Torah with his hands." "Did he?" "He did." "And then the General came to my father." It was not too dark for me to see that Grandfather closed his eyes. "Spit, he said." "Did he?" "No," she said, and she said no as if it was any other word from any other story, not having the weight it had in this one. "Spit, the General with blond hair said." "And he did not spit?" She did not say no, but she rotated her head from this to that. "He put it in my mother's mouth, and he said spit or." "He put it in her mother's mouth." "No," the hero said without volume. "I will kill her here and now if you do not spit, the General said, but he would not spit." "And?" Grandfather asked. "And he killed her." I will tell you that what made this story most scary was how rapid it was moving. I do not mean what happened in the story, but how the story was told. I felt that it could not be stopped. "It is not true," Grandfather said, but only to himself. "Then the General put the gun in the mouth of my younger sister, who was four years old. She was crying very much. I remember that. Spit, he said, spit or." "Did he?" Grandfather asked. "No," she said. "He did not spit," I told the hero. "Why didn't he spit?" "And the General shot my sister. I could not look at her, but I remember the sound of when she hit the ground. I hear that sound when things hit the ground still. Anything." If I could, I would make it so nothing ever hit the ground again. "I don't want to hear any more," the hero said, so it was at this point that I ceased translating. (Jonathan, if you still do not want to know the rest, do not read this. But if you do persevere, do not do so for curiosity. That is not a good enough reason.) "They tore the dress of my older sister. She was pregnant and had a big belly. Her husband stood at the end of the line. They had made a house here." "Where?" I asked. "Where we are standing. We are in the bedroom." "How can you perceive this?" "She was very cold, I remember, even though it was the summer. They pulled down her panties, and

one of the men put the end of the gun in her place, and the others laughed so hard, I remember the laughing always. Spit, the General said to my father, spit or no more baby." "Did he?" Grandfather asked. "No," she said. "He turned his head, and they shot my sister in her place." "Why would he not spit?" I asked. "But my sister did not die. So they held the gun in her mouth while she was on the ground crying and screaming, and with her hands on her place, which was making so much blood. Spit, the General said, or we will not shoot her. Please, my father said, not like this. Spit, he said, or we will let her lie here in this pain and die across time." "Did he?" "No. He did not spit." "And?" "And they did not shoot her." "Why?" I asked. "Why did he not spit? He was so religious?" "No," she said, "he did not believe in God." "He was a fool," Grandfather said. "You are wrong," she said. "You are wrong," Grandfather said. "You are wrong," she said. "And then?" I asked, and I must confess that I felt shameful about inquiring. "He put the gun against my father's head. Spit, the General said, and we will kill you." "And?" Grandfather asked. "And he spit." The hero was several meters distant, placing dirt in a plastic bag, which is called a Ziploc. After, he told me that this was for his grandmother, should he ever inform her of his voyage. "What about you?" Grandfather asked. "Where were you?" "I was there." "Where? How did you escape?" "My sister, I told you, was not dead. They left her there on the ground after they shot her in her place. She started to crawl away. She could not use her legs, but she pulled herself with her hands and arms. She left a line of blood behind her, and was afraid that they would find her with this." "Did they kill her?" Grandfather asked. "No. They stood and laughed while she crawled away. I remember exactly what the laughing sounded like. It was like" – she laughed into the darkness – "HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA. All of the Gentiles were watching from their windows, and she called to each, Help me, please help me, I am dying." "Did they?" Grandfather asked. "No. They all turned away their faces and hid. I cannot blame them." "Why not?" I asked. "Because," Grandfather said, answering for Augustine, "if they had helped, they would have been killed, and so would their families." "I would still blame them," I said. "Can you forgive them?" Grandfather asked Augustine. She closed her eyes to say, No, I cannot forgive them. "I would desire someone to help me," I said. "But," Grandfather said, "you would not help somebody if it signified that you would be murdered and your family would be murdered." (I thought about this for many moments, and I understood that he was correct. I only had to think about Little Igor to be certain that I would also have turned away and hid my face.) It was so obscure now, because it was late, and because there were no artificial lights for many kilometers, that we could not see one another, but only hear the voices. "You would forgive them?" I asked. "Yes," Grandfather said. "Yes. I would try to." "You can only say that because you cannot imagine what it is like," Augustine said. "I can." "It is not a thing that you can imagine. It only is. After that, there can be no imagining".

2.8. Kazuo Ishiguro. *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954. He left Japan with his parents and elder sister in April 1960 to live in Britain. During his teenage years Kazuo began writing songs, inspired by his heroes Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell. His first employment after leaving school was assisting the royal guests to shoot game birds. Ishiguro travelled in the USA and Canada, usually hitch-hiking, and on his return to England, he tried to write fiction.

He studied for his BA in English Literature and Philosophy at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He continued to write, and studied the Master of Arts course in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. The novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, was published in 1982 in the UK and in the USA.

An Artist of the Floating World (1986) won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, making Ishiguro a highly visible young writer. He married Lorna MacDougall in 1986. In 1989 Ishiguro published *The Remains of the Day* which won the Booker Prize that year.

In the years that followed, Ishiguro published further novels – *The Unconsoled* (1995), *When We Were Orphans* (2000), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *The Buried Giant* (2015).

He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017.

The novel *Never Let Me Go* is set in England in the 1990s. The narrator is Kathy H., who is a former student at Hailsham. She is now a "carer" who helps "donors" recuperate after they give away their organs. Hailsham is described as a special place where the children are brought up and educated only for growing organs for donation. The students learn that they are clones, and that they will leave Hailsham and soon begin "training" as "carers" and then as "donors", who give their organs away, one by one, for the benefit of non-cloned humans, with "carers'" helping the donors during these difficult surgeries. The destinies of several of clones are traced, and the cruel experiment is then terminated, having caused the irreparable trauma to the survivors.

Discussion

1. What makes the reader suspect that there is something wrong with the characters at the beginning of the narrative?
2. Who is the narrator? What is her personal story? How is it related to the other characters' stories?
3. How is the novel's structure aligned with the life stages of the clones?
4. Explain why the novel is also a dystopia in addition to being a book of science fiction.

5. Do you perceive the clones – Kathy H., Tommy and Ruth and others – as individual unique personalities or as mechanically produced bodies for "donations"? Explain your point.
6. How does the author create the atmosphere at Hailsham?
7. Give character profiles of Hailsham's guardians? Do they suffer moral dilemmas working there?
8. What euphemisms are used in the novel and what role do they play? What do such words as 'donation', 'caring', 'completing', 'deferral' stand for?
9. Comment on the role of art in the novel. How is it connected with love?
10. What ethical issue does the author draw our attention to?

Comment on the following episodes. How do they highlight the issue of the body-soul connection?

a) My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated', even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I am boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'. I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it.

Anyway, I'm not making any big claims for myself. I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If you're one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful – about my bedsit, my car, above all, the way I get to pick and choose who I look after. And I'm a Hailsham student – which is enough by itself sometimes to get people's backs up. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the other privileged estates. No wonder she has a great record. I've heard it said enough, so I'm sure you've heard it plenty more, and maybe there's something in it. But I'm not the first to be allowed to pick and choose, and I doubt if I'll be the

last. And anyway, I've done my share of looking after donors brought up in every kind of place. By the time I finish, remember, I'll have done twelve years of this, and it's only for the last six they've let me choose.

And why shouldn't they? Carers aren't machines. You try and do your best for every donor, but in the end, it wears you down. You don't have unlimited patience and energy. So when you get a chance to choose, of course, you choose your own kind. That's natural. There's no way I could have gone on for as long as I have if I'd stopped feeling for my donors every step of the way. And anyway, if I'd never started choosing, how would I ever have got close again to Ruth and Tommy after all those years?

But these days, of course, there are fewer and fewer donors left who I remember, and so in practice, I haven't been choosing that much. As I say, the work gets a lot harder when you don't have that deeper link with the donor, and though I'll miss being a carer, it feels just about right to be finishing at last come the end of the year.

Ruth, incidentally, was only the third or fourth donor I got to choose. She already had a carer assigned to her at the time, and I remember it taking a bit of nerve on my part. But in the end I managed it, and the instant I saw her again, at that recovery centre in Dover, all our differences – while they didn't exactly vanish – seemed not nearly as important as all the other things: like the fact that we'd grown up together at Hailsham, the fact that we knew and remembered things no one else did. It's ever since then, I suppose, I started seeking out for my donors people from the past, and whenever I could, people from Hailsham.

There have been times over the years when I've tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I've told myself I shouldn't look back so much. But then there came a point when I just stopped resisting. It had to do with this particular donor I had once, in my third year as a carer; it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham. He'd just come through his third donation, it hadn't gone well, and he must have known he wasn't going to make it. He could hardly breathe, but he looked towards me and said: 'Hailsham. I bet that was a beautiful place.' Then the next morning, when I was making conversation to keep his mind off it all, and I asked where he'd grown up, he mentioned some place in Dorset and his face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace. And I realised then how desperately he didn't want reminded. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham.

So over the next five or six days, I told him whatever he wanted to know, and he'd lie there, all hooked up, a gentle smile breaking through. He'd ask me about the big things and the little things. About our guardians, about how we each had our own collection chests under our beds, the football, the rounders, the little path that took you all round the outside of the main house, round all its nooks and crannies, the duck pond, the food, the view from the Art Room over the fields on a foggy morning. Sometimes he'd make me say things over and over; things I'd told him

only the day before, he'd ask about like I'd never told him. 'Did you have a sports pavilion?' 'Which guardian was your special favourite?' At first I thought this was just the drugs, but then I realised his mind was clear enough. What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his. That was when I first understood, really understood, just how lucky we'd been – Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us.

Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I'll think: 'Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually is Hailsham!' Then I see it's impossible and I go on driving, my thoughts drifting on elsewhere. In particular, there are those pavilions. I spot them all over the country, standing on the far side of playing fields, little white prefab buildings with a row of windows unnaturally high up, tucked almost under the eaves. I think they built a whole lot like that in the fifties and sixties, which is probably when ours was put up. If I drive past one I keep looking over to it for as long as possible, and one day I'll crash the car like that, but I keep doing it. Not long ago I was driving through an empty stretch of Worcestershire and saw one beside a cricket ground so like ours at Hailsham I actually turned the car and went back for a second look.

b) Nothing seemed to change much in the week or so after that trip. I didn't expect it to stay that way though, and sure enough, by the start of October, I started noticing little differences. For one thing, though Tommy carried on with his animal pictures, he became cagey about doing them in my presence. We weren't quite back to how it was when I'd first become his carer and all the Cottages stuff was still hanging over us. But it was like he'd thought about it and come to a decision: that he'd continue with the animals as the mood took him, but if I came in, he'd stop and put them away. I wasn't that hurt by this. In fact, in many ways, it was a relief: those animals staring us in the face when we were together would have only made things more awkward.

But there were other changes I found less easy. I don't mean we weren't still having some good times up in his room. We were even having sex every now and then. But what I couldn't help noticing was how, more and more, Tommy tended to identify himself with the other donors at the centre. If, for instance, the two of us were reminiscing about old Hailsham people, he'd sooner or later move the conversation round to one of his current donor friends who'd maybe said or done something similar to what we were recalling. There was one time in particular,

when I drove into the Kingsfield after a long journey and stepped out of the car. The Square was looking a bit like that time I'd come to the centre with Ruth the day we'd gone to see the boat. It was an overcast autumn afternoon, and there was no one about except for a group of donors clustered under the overhanging roof of the recreation building. I saw Tommy was with them – he was standing with a shoulder against a post – and was listening to a donor who was sitting crouched on the entrance steps. I came towards them a little way, then stopped and waited, there in the open, under the grey sky. But Tommy, though he'd seen me, went on listening to his friend, and eventually he and all the others burst out laughing. Even then, he carried on listening and smiling. He claimed afterwards he'd signalled to me to come over, but if he had, it hadn't been at all obvious. All I registered was him smiling vaguely in my direction, then going back to what his friend was saying. Okay, he was in the middle of something, and after a minute or so, he did come away, and the two of us went up to his room. But it was quite different to the way things would have happened before. And it wasn't just that he'd kept me waiting out in the Square. I wouldn't have minded that so much. It was more that I sensed for the first time that day something close to resentment on his part at having to come away with me, and once we were up in his room, the atmosphere between us wasn't so great.

To be fair, a lot of it might have been down to me as much as him. Because as I'd stood there watching them all talking and laughing, I'd felt an unexpected little tug; because there was something about the way these donors had arranged themselves in a rough semi-circle, something about their poses, almost studiedly relaxed, whether standing or sitting, as though to announce to the world how much each one of them was savouring the company, that reminded me of the way our little gang used to sit around our pavilion together. That comparison, as I say, tugged something inside me, and so maybe, once we were up in his room, it was as much me feeling resentful as the other way round.

I'd feel a similar little prickle of resentment each time he told me I didn't understand something or other because I wasn't yet a donor. But apart from one particular time, which I'll come to in a moment, a little prickle was all it was. Usually he'd say these things to me half-jokingly, almost affectionately. And even when there was something more to it, like the time he told me to stop taking his dirty washing to the laundry because he could do it himself, it hardly amounted to a row. That time, I'd asked him:

'What difference does it make, which one of us takes the towels down? I'm going out that way anyway.'

To which he'd shaken his head and said: 'Look, Kath, I'll sort out my own things. If you were a donor, you'd see.'

Okay, it did niggle, but it was something I could forget easily enough. But as I say, there was this one time he brought it up, about my not being a donor, that really riled me.

It happened about a week after the notice came for his fourth donation. We'd been expecting it and had already talked it through a lot. In fact, we'd had some of our most intimate conversations since the Littlehampton trip discussing the fourth donation. I've known donors to react in all sorts of ways to their fourth donation. Some want to talk about it all the time, endlessly and pointlessly. Others will only joke about it, while others refuse to discuss it at all. And then there's this odd tendency among donors to treat a fourth donation as something worthy of congratulations. A donor 'on a fourth', even one who's been pretty unpopular up till then, is treated with special respect. Even the doctors and nurses play up to this: a donor on a fourth will go in for a check and be greeted by whitecoats smiling and shaking their hand. Well, Tommy and I, we talked about all of this, sometimes jokingly, other times seriously and carefully. We discussed all the different ways people tried to handle it, and which ways made the best sense. Once, lying side by side on the bed with the dark coming on, he said:

'You know why it is, Kath, why everyone worries so much about the fourth? It's because they're not sure they'll really complete. If you knew for certain you'd complete, it would be easier. But they never tell us for sure.'

I'd been wondering for a while if this would come up, and I'd been thinking about how I'd respond. But when it did, I couldn't find much to say. So I just said: 'It's just a lot of rubbish, Tommy. Just talk, wild talk. It's not even worth thinking about.'

But Tommy would have known I had nothing to back up my words. He'd have known, too, he was raising questions to which even the doctors had no certain answers. You'll have heard the same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you've technically completed, you're still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centres, no carers, no friends; how there's nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It's horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don't want to think about it. Not the whitecoats, not the carers – and usually not the donors. But now and again, a donor will bring it up, as Tommy did that evening, and I wish now we'd talked about it. As it was, after I dismissed it as rubbish, we both shrank back from the whole territory. At least, though, I knew it was on Tommy's mind after that, and I was glad he'd at least confided in me that far. What I'm saying is that all in all I was under the impression we were dealing with the fourth donation pretty well together, and that's why I was so knocked off balance by what he came out with that day we walked around the field.

The Kingsfield doesn't have much in the way of grounds. The Square's the obvious congregating point and the few bits behind the buildings look more like wasteland. The largest chunk, which the donors call 'the field', is a rectangle of

overgrown weeds and thistles held in by wire-mesh fences. There's always been talk of turning it into a proper lawn for the donors, but they haven't done it yet, even now. It might not be so peaceful even if they did get round to it, because of the big road nearby. All the same, when donors get restless and need to walk it off, that's where they tend to go, scraping through all the nettles and brambles. The particular morning I'm talking about, it was really foggy, and I knew the field would be soaking, but Tommy had been insistent we go there for a walk. Not surprisingly, we were the only ones there – which probably suited Tommy fine. After crashing about the thickets for a few minutes, he stopped next to the fence and stared at the blank fog on the other side. Then he said:

'Kath, I don't want you to take this the wrong way. But I've been thinking it over a lot. Kath, I think I ought to get a different carer.'

In the few seconds after he said this, I realised I wasn't surprised by it at all; that in some funny way I'd been waiting for it. But I was angry all the same and didn't say anything.

'It's not just because the fourth donation's coming up,' he went on. 'It's not just about that. It's because of stuff like what happened last week. When I had all that kidney trouble. There's going to be much more stuff like that coming.'

'That's why I came and found you,' I said. 'That's exactly why I came to help you. For what's starting now. And it's what Ruth wanted too.'

'Ruth wanted that other thing for us,' Tommy said. 'She wouldn't necessarily have wanted you to be my carer through this last bit.'

'Tommy,' I said, and I suppose by now I was furious, but I kept my voice quiet and under control, 'I'm the one to help you. That's why I came and found you again.'

'Ruth wanted the other thing for us,' Tommy repeated. 'All this is something else. Kath, I don't want to be that way in front of you.'

He was looking down at the ground, a palm pressed against the wire-mesh fence, and for a moment he looked like he was listening intently to the sound of the traffic somewhere beyond the fog. And that was when he said it, shaking his head slightly:

'Ruth would have understood. She was a donor, so she would have understood. I'm not saying she'd necessarily have wanted the same thing for herself. If she'd been able to, maybe she'd have wanted you as her carer right to the end. But she'd have understood, about me wanting to do it differently. Kath, sometimes you just don't see it. You don't see it because you're not a donor.'

It was when he came out with this that I turned and walked off. As I said, I'd been almost prepared for the bit about not wanting me any more as his carer. But what had really stung, coming after all those other little things, like when he'd kept me standing in the Square, was what he'd said then, the way he'd divided me off yet again, not just from all the other donors, but from him and Ruth.

2.9. Cormac McCarthy. *The Road* (2006)

Cormac McCarthy was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1933. He attended the University of Tennessee, majoring in liberal arts, but left it to join the U.S. Air Force, to resume his studies after four years in the army. His first short stories came out when he was still at university. McCarthy worked in Chicago as an auto mechanic, but his vocation was creative writing. McCarthy travelled to Europe in the 1960s within the travelling fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) became a success, while he was travelling in Europe with his second wife. His next novel, *Outer Dark* (1968) is a philosophical speculation on a Calvinistic conception of sin (find out what it means if you have forgotten) and retribution; it is based on the Biblical reference to Jesus who says: "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". The deeds of the characters are really dark and horrible: murder, incest, suicidal attempts and even cannibalism. Novels with biblical connotations continued to appear (Child of God, 1973); and for his semi-autobiographical novel *Suttree* (1979) he received a MacArthur Fellowship.

McCarthy's most notable works to date are *Blood Meridian* (1985), grounded in the southern gothic and western traditions (with dark, grotesque and sometimes supernatural elements) and where the actions take place in the southern and western United States. The first novel (*All the Pretty Horses*, 1992) of the famous *The Border Trilogy* earned him numerous awards.

The Road (2006) received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction, the Believer Book Award and the 2007 Pulitzer Prize.

McCarthy is notorious for being protective of his privacy and does not frequently give interviews.

The Road is a dystopian novel. A man and his son are struggling for survival in a postapocalyptic world after a mysterious catastrophe of global dimensions in the land which is "barren, silent, godless". People have become cannibals. The main character's overwhelming love for his son is the only human value amidst this horror. The novel does not practically have any names – of people or places. It is characterized by scenes containing extreme violence – a motif of McCormac's fiction in general.

Discussion

1. Why is the novel's title "The Road"? Which other novel/novels with the same title can you think of? Are there intertextual connections?
2. What is the novel's structure? Who narrates the story?

3. What picture of the landscape is presented after the unnamed catastrophe?
4. Which trials of survival do the father and the son go through? Can they be compared with those of Robinson Crusoe's?
5. How does the author show the collapse of humanity in people? What are the reasons?
6. Which characters appear on the road? To what age or social groups do they belong? What is the is role in the survival?
7. Consider the viewpoints of the boy, the man, and the elderly man regarding life, death, and God. What branch of philosophy or religion do each of their viewpoints seem most closely aligned with? Which philosophical (or eternally true) ideas about life and death are expressed by the novel's characters?
8. Comment on the ending of the novel.
9. How would you express the novel's main idea?

 These scenes depict the bleak picture of the post-apocalyptic world. Comment on the image and the philosophical ideas that appear in the excerpts.

 a) When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him. Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath. He pushed away the plastic tarpaulin and raised himself in the stinking robes and blankets and looked toward the east for any light but there was none. In the dream from which he'd wakened he had wandered in a cave where the child led him by the hand. Their light playing over the wet flowstone walls. Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast. Deep stone flues where the water dripped and sang. Tolling in the silence the minutes of the earth and the hours and the days of it and the years without cease. Until they stood in a great stone room where lay a black and ancient lake. And on the far shore a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders. It swung its head low over the water as if to take the scent of what it could not see. Crouching there pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it. Its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell. It swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned With the first gray light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasnt sure. He hadnt kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here.

When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again. Then he just sat there holding the binoculars and watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land. He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke.

When he got back the boy was still asleep. He pulled the blue plastic tarp off of him and folded it and carried it out to the grocery cart and packed it and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a plastic bag and a plastic bottle of syrup. He spread the small tarp they used for a table on the ground and laid every- thing out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth and then he just sat watching the boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask in the night and it was buried somewhere in the blankets. He watched the boy and he looked out through the trees toward the road. This was not a safe place. They could be seen from the road now it was day. The boy turned in the blankets. Then he opened his eyes. Hi, Papa, he said. I'm right here. I know.

b) They bivouacked in the woods much nearer to the road than he would have liked. He had to drag the cart while the boy steered from behind and they built a fire for the old man to warm himself though he didnt much like that either. They ate and the old man sat wrapped in his solitary quilt and gripped his spoon like a child. They had only two cups and he drank his coffee from the bowl he'd eaten from, his thumbs hooked over the rim. Sitting like a starved and threadbare buddha, staring into the coals. You cant go with us, you know, the man said. He nodded. How long have you been on the road? I was always on the road. You cant stay in one place. How do you live? I just keep going. I knew this was coming. You knew it was coming?

Yeah. This or something like it. I always believed in it. Did you try to get ready for it? No. What would you do? I dont know. People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didnt believe in that. Tomorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there. I guess not. Even if you knew what to do you wouldnt know what to do. You wouldnt know if you wanted to do it or not. Suppose you were the last one left? Suppose you did that to yourself? Do you wish you would die? No. But I might wish I had died. When you're alive you've always got that ahead of you. Or you might wish you'd never been born. Well. Beggars cant be choosers. You think that would be asking too much. What's done is done. Anyway, it's foolish to ask for luxuries in times like these. I guess so.

Nobody wants to be here and nobody wants to leave. He lifted his head and looked across the fire at the boy. Then he looked at the man. The man could see his small eyes watching him in the firelight. God knows what those eyes saw. He got up to pile more wood on the fire and he raked the coals back from the dead leaves. The red sparks rose in a shudder and died in the blackness overhead. The old man drank the last of his coffee and set the bowl before him and leaned toward the heat with his hands out. The man watched him. How would you know if you were the last man on earth? he said.

I dont guess you would know it. You'd just be it.

Nobody would know it.

It wouldnt make any difference. When you die it's the same as if everybody else did too.

I guess God would know it. Is that it?

There is no God.

No?

There is no God and we are his prophets.

I dont understand how you're still alive. How do you eat?

I dont know.

You dont know?

People give you things.

People give you things.

Yes.

To eat.

To eat. Yes.

No they dont.

You did.

No I didnt. The boy did.

There's other people on the road. You're not the only ones.

Are you the only one?

The old man peered warily. What do you mean? he said.

Are there people with you?

What people?

Any people.

There's not any people. What are you talking about?

I'm talking about you. About what line of work you might be in.

The old man didnt answer.

I suppose you want to go with us.

Go with you.

Yes.

You wont take me with you.

You dont want to go.

I wouldnt have even come this far but I was hungry.

The people that gave you food. Where are they?

There's not any people. I just made that up.

What else did you make up?

I'm just on the road the same as you. No different.

Is your name really Ely?

No.

You dont want to say your name.

I dont want to say it.

Why?

I couldnt trust you with it. To do something with it. I dont want anybody talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there. I mean, you could talk about me maybe. But nobody could say that it was me. I could be anybody. I think in times like these the less said the better. If something had happened and we were survivors and we met on the road then we'd have something to talk about.

But we're not. So we dont.

Maybe not.

You just dont want to say in front of the boy.

You're not a shill for a pack of roadagents?

I'm not anything. I'll leave if you want me to. I can find the road.

You dont have to leave.

I've not seen a fire in a long time, that's all. I live like an animal. You dont want to know the things I've eaten. When I saw that boy I thought that I had died.

You thought he was an angel?

I didnt know what he was. I never thought to see a child again. I didnt know that would happen.

What if I said that he's a god?

The old man shook his head. I'm past all that now. Have been for years. Where men cant live gods fare no better. You'll see. It's better to be alone. So I hope that's not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing so I hope it's not true. Things will be better when everybody's gone.

2.10. Richard Powers. *The Echomaker* (2006)

Richard Powers was born in Evanston, Illinois, in 1957. When he was 11 his family moved to Bangkok, Thailand. From early boyhood he became an avid reader, and when back in the US, he enrolled at the University of Illinois with a major in physics, switching soon to English literature.

He has also won many literaty awards over the course of his career, including the 1991 Time Book of the Year, the James Fenimore Cooper Prize,

the National Book Award for Fiction. Powers has published thirteen novels and has taught at the University of Illinois and Stanford University. He won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Overstory* (2018).

His works explore the effects of modern science and technology. Following the success of *Galatea 2.2* (1995), in the novel *Plowing the Dark* (2000), he explored the possibility of construction of a high-tech virtual reality simulator. The novel *Generosity: An Enhancement* (2009) focuses on social alienation and scientific progress. Similar to *The Overstory*, *Bewilderment* (2021) explores the environmental degradation of the planet.

The novel *The Echo Maker* won the 2006 National Book Award for Fiction. On a winter night on a remote Nebraska road, twenty-seven-year-old Mark Schluter flips his truck in a near-fatal accident. His older sister, Karin, his only near kin, returns reluctantly to their hometown to nurse Mark back from a traumatic head injury. But when he emerges from a protracted coma, Mark believes that this woman – who looks, acts, and sounds just like his sister – is really an impostor. Shattered by her brother's refusal to recognize her, Karin contacts the cognitive neurologist Gerald Weber, famous for his case histories describing brain disorders. Weber recognizes Mark's condition as a rare case of Capgras syndrome – the delusion that people in one's life are doubles or impostors – and eagerly investigates.

What he discovers in Mark slowly undermines even his own sense of being. Meanwhile, Mark, armed only with a note left by an anonymous witness, attempts to learn what happened on the night of his inexplicable accident.

The novel explores the issues of social identity, reflects information about neuropsychological research, raises ecological awareness. The novel also instills in the reader the sense that life in the U.S. has changed dramatically after the 9/11 attacks. In *The Echo Maker*, there is a lot of uncertainty, the characters seem uprooted and traumatized.

Discussion

1. Describe the dramatic events of the plot. Which of them can serve as a cartalyst?
2. What concepts in neuropsychological research are developed in the book?
3. How are cultural, medical, and political themes interrelated in the novel?
4. What is the Capgras Syndrome? How does it function in the novel?
5. Describe each of the following characters' role in the novel:
   - Mark Schluter
   - Barbara Gilliespie
   - Dr Weber

- Karin Schluter
- Daniel Riegel
- Robert Karsh

6. How do different characters approach Mark's condition of agnosia?
7. What characteristic features of the neuronovel does *The Echomaker* have?
8. Is it possible to identify a clear message in this novel?
9. How has the novel enriched your knowledge with scientific data?

Find scientific and philosophical aspects in the following episodes.

a) To find the soul it is necessary to lose it. – A. R. Luria (epigraph)

b) I Am No One – Loren Eiseley, The Immense Journey, "The Slit"

We are all potential fossils still carrying within our bodies the crudities of former existences, the marks of a world in which living creatures flow with little more consistency than clouds from age to age.

The aide wouldn't say anything over the phone. Just that Mark had flipped over on the shoulder of North Line Road and had lain pinned in his cab, almost frozen by the time the paramedics found and freed him. For a long time after hanging up, she couldn't feel her fingers until she found them pressed into her cheeks. Her face was numb, as if she had been the one lying out there, in the freezing February night.

Her hands, stiff and blue, clawed the wheel as she slipped through the reservations. First the Winnebago, then the rolling Omaha. The scrub trees along the patchy road bowed under tufts of snow. Winnebago Junction, the Pow Wow grounds, the tribal court and volunteer fire department, the station where she bought her tax-free gas, the hand-painted wooden shingle reading "Native Arts Gift Shop," the high school – Home of the Indians – where she'd volunteer-tutored until despair drove her off: the scene turned away from her, hostile. On the long, empty stretch east of Rosalie, a lone male her brother's age in a too-light coat and hat – Go Big Red – tracked through the roadside drift. He turned and snarled as she passed, repelling the intrusion.

The suture of the centerline drew her downward into the snowy black. It made no sense: Mark, a near-professional driver, rolling off an arrow-straight country road that was as familiar to him as breathing. Driving off the road, in central Nebraska – like falling off a wooden horse. She toyed with the date: 02/20/02. Did it mean anything? Her palms butted the wheel, and the car shook. Your brother has had an accident. In fact, he'd long ago taken every wrong turn you could take in life, and from the wrong lane. Telephone calls coming in at awful hours, as far back as she could remember. But never one like this.

She used the radio to keep herself awake. She tuned in to a crackpot talk-radio show about the best way to protect your pets from water-borne terrorist poisonings. All the deranged, static voices in the dark seeped into her, whispering what she was: alone on a deserted road, half a mile from her own disaster.

What a loving child Mark had been, staffing his earthworm hospital, selling his toys to stave off the farm foreclosure, throwing his eight-year-old body between their parents that hideous night nineteen years ago when Cappy took a loop of power cord to Joan. That was how she pictured her brother, as she fell headlong into the dark. The root of all his accidents: too caring by half.

Outside Grand Island, two hundred miles down from Sioux, as the day broke and the sky went peach, she glimpsed the Platte. First light glinted off its muddy brown, calming her. Something caught her eye, bobbing pearl waves flecked with red. Even she thought highway hypnosis, at first. A carpet of four-foot birds spread as far as the distant tree line. She'd seen them every spring for more than thirty years, and still the dancing mass made her jerk the wheel, almost following her brother.

He'd waited until the birds returned to spin out. He'd been a mess already, back in October, when she drove this same route for their mother's wake. Camping out with his beef-packing friends in the ninth circle of Nintendo hell, starting in on the six-packs for liquid brunch, fully loaded by the time he headed in to work on the swing shift. Traditions to protect, Rabbit; family honor. She hadn't had the will then, to talk sense to him. He wouldn't have heard her, if she had. But he'd made it through the winter, even pulled himself together a little. Only for this.

Kearney rose up: the scattered outskirts, the newly extruded super-store strip, the fast-food grease trough along Second, the old main drag. The whole town suddenly struck her as a glorified I-80 exit ramp. Familiarity filled her with a weird, inappropriate calm. Home.

She found Good Samaritan the way the birds found the Platte. She spoke to the trauma doctor, working hard to follow him. He kept saying moderate severity, stable, and lucky. He looked young enough to have been out partying with Mark earlier that night. She wanted to ask to see his med school diploma. Instead she asked what "moderate severity" meant, and nodded politely at the opaque answer. She asked about "lucky," and the trauma doctor explained: "Lucky to be alive."

66 99 c) Firemen had cut him out of his cab with an acetylene torch. He might have lain there all night, coffined against the windshield, freezing and bleeding to death, just off the shoulder of the country road, except for the anonymous call from a gas station on the edge of town.

They let her into the unit to see him. A nurse tried to prepare her, but Karin heard nothing. She stood in front of a nest of cables and monitors. On the bed lay a lump of white wrapping. A face cradled inside the tangle of tubes, swollen and rainbowed, coated in abrasions. His bloody lips and cheeks were flecked with embedded gravel.

The matted hair gave way to a patch of bare skull sprouting wires. The forehead had been pressed to a hot grill. In a flimsy robin's-egg gown, her brother struggled to inhale.

She heard herself call him, from a distance. "Mark?" The eyes opened at the sound, like the hard plastic eyes of her girlhood dolls. Nothing moved, not even his eyelids. Nothing, until his mouth pumped, without sound. She leaned down into the equipment. Air hissed through his lips, above the hum of the monitors. Wind through a field of ready wheat.

His face knew her. But nothing came out of his mouth except a trickle of saliva. His eyes pleaded, terrified. He needed something from her, life or death. "It's okay; I'm here," she said. But assurance only made him worse. She was exciting him, exactly what the nurses had forbidden. She looked away, anywhere but at his animal eyes. The room burned into her memory: the drawn curtain, the two racks of threatening electronic equipment, the lime sherbet–colored wall, the rolling table alongside his bed.

She tried again. "Markie, it's Karin. You're going to be all right." Saying it made a kind of truth. A groan escaped his sealed mouth. His hand, stuck with an IV tube, reached up and grabbed her wrist. His aim stunned her. The grip was feeble but deadly, drawing her down into the mesh of tubes. His fingers feathered at her, frantic, as if, in this split second, she might still keep his truck from wiping out.

The nurse made her leave. Karin Schluter sat in the trauma waiting room, a glass terrarium at the end of a long corridor smelling of antiseptics, dread, and ancient health magazines. Rows of head-bowed farmers and their wives, in dark sweatshirts and overalls, sat in the squared-off, padded apricot chairs alongside her. She figured them: Father heart attack; husband hunting accident; child overdose. Off in the corner, a muted television beamed images of a mountain wasteland scattered with guerrillas. Afghanistan, winter, 2002. After a while, she noticed a thread of blood wicking down her right index finger, where she'd bitten through her cuticle. She found herself rising and drifting to the restroom, where she vomited.

Later, she ate, something warm and sticky from the hospital cafeteria. At one point, she stood in one of those half-finished stairwells of poured concrete meant to be seen only when the building was on fire, calling back to Sioux City, the massive computer and home electronics company where she worked in consumer relations. She stood smoothing her rumpled bouclé skirt as if her supervisor could see her over the line. She told her boss, as vaguely as she could, about the accident. A remarkably level account: thirty years of practice hiding Schluter truths. She asked for two days off. He offered her three. She started to protest, but switched at once to grateful acceptance.

Back in the waiting room, she witnessed eight middle-aged men in flannel standing in a ring, their slow eyes scanning the floor. A murmur issued from them, wind teasing the lonely screens of a farmhouse. The sound rose and fell in waves.

It took her a moment to realize: a prayer circle, for another victim who'd come in just after Mark. A makeshift Pentecostal service, covering anything that scalpels, drugs, and lasers couldn't. The gift of tongues descended on the circle of men, like small talk at a family reunion. Home was the place you never escape, even in nightmare.

Stable. Lucky. The words got Karin through to midday. But when the trauma doctor next talked to her, the words had become cerebral edema. Something had spiked the pressure inside her brother's skull. Nurses tried cooling his body. The doctor mentioned a ventilator and ventricular drain. Luck and stability were gone.

When they let her see Mark again, she no longer knew him. The person they took her to the second time lay comatose, his face collapsed into some stranger's. His eyes wouldn't open when she called his name. His arms hung still, even when she squeezed them.

Hospital personnel came to talk to her. They spoke to her as if she were brain-damaged. She pumped them for information. Mark's blood alcohol content had been just under the Nebraska limit – three or four beers in the hours before rolling his truck. Nothing else noticeable in his system. His truck was destroyed.

Two policemen took her aside in the corridor and asked her questions. She answered what she knew, which was nothing. An hour later, she wondered if she'd imagined the conversation. Late that afternoon, a man of fifty in a blue work shirt sat down next to her where she waited. She managed to turn and blink. Not possible, not even in this town: hit on, in the trauma-unit waiting room.

"You should get a lawyer," the man said.

She blinked again and shook her head. Sleep deprivation.

"You're with the fellow who rolled his truck? Read about him in the Telegraph. You should definitely get a lawyer."

Her head would not stop shaking. "Are you one?"

The man jerked back. "Good God, no. Just neighborly advice."

She hunted down the newspaper and read the flimsy accident account until it crumbled. She sat in the glass terrarium as long as she could, then circled the ward, then sat again. Every hour, she begged to see him. Each time, they denied her. She dozed for five minutes at a shot, propped in the sculpted apricot chair. Mark rose up in her dreams, like buffalo grass after a prairie fire. A child who, out of pity, always picked the worst players for his team. An adult who called only when weepy drunk. Her eyes stung and her mouth thickened with scum. She checked the mirror in the floor's bathroom: blotchy and teetering, her fall of red hair a tangled bead-curtain. But still presentable, given everything.

"There has been some reversal," the doctor explained. He spoke in B waves and millimeters of mercury, lobes and ventricles and hematomas. Karin finally understood. Mark would need surgery.

They slit his throat and put a bolt into his skull. The nurses stopped answering Karin's questions. Hours later, in her best consumer-relations voice, she asked again to see him. They said he was too weakened by the procedures. The nurses offered to get something for her, and Karin only slowly realized they meant medication.

"Oh, no thanks," she said. "I'm good."

"Go home for a while," the trauma doctor advised. "Doctor's orders. You need some rest."

"Other people are sleeping on the floor of the waiting room. I can get a sleeping bag and be right back."

"There's nothing you can do right now," the doctor claimed. But that couldn't be; not in the world she came from.

She promised to go rest if they let her see Mark, just for a moment. They did. His eyes were still closed, and he responded to nothing.

Then she saw the note. It lay on the bed stand, waiting. No one could tell her when it had appeared. Some messenger had slipped into the room unseen, even while Karin was shut out. The writing was spidery, ethereal: immigrant scrawl from a century ago.

I am No One
but Tonight on North Line Road
GOD led me to you
so You could Live
and bring back someone else.

A flock of birds, each one burning. Stars swoop down to bullets. Hot red specks take flesh, nest there, a body part, part body.

Lasts forever: no change to measure.

Flock of fiery cinders. When gray pain of them thins, then always water. Flattest width so slow it fails as liquid. Nothing in the end but flow. Nextless stream, lowest thing above knowing. A thing itself the cold and so can't feel it.

Body flat water, falling an inch a mile. Torso long as the world. Frozen run all the way from open to close. Great oxbows, age bends, lazy delayed S, switch current to still as long as possible the one long drop it already finishes.

Not even river, not even wet brown slow west, no now or then except in now and then rising. Face forcing up into soundless scream. White column, lit in a river of light. Then pure terror, pealing into air, flipping and falling, anything but hit target.

One sound gets not a word but still says: come. Come with. Try death.

At last only water. Flat water spreading to its level. Water that is nothing but into nothing falls.

She checked into one of those crane-tourist places off the interstate. It seemed to have just fallen off the back of a truck. They gouged her for a room. But she was close to the hospital – all that mattered. She stayed one night, then

had to find something else. As next of kin, she qualified for the shelter house a block from the hospital, a hostel subsidized with the pocket change of the world's largest global fast-food cartel. The Clown House, she and Mark had called it, back when their father was dying of fatal insomnia four years before. It had taken the man forty days to die, and at the last, when he finally agreed to go to the hospital, their mother sometimes stayed overnight at the Clown House to be near him. Karin could not face that memory, not now. Instead, she drove to Mark's place, half an hour away.

2.11. David Mitchell. *Black Swan Green* (2006)

David Mitchell was born in Southport, England, in 1969. He studied for a degree in English and American Literature and received his MA in Comparative Literature at the University of Kent. Mitchel has a good history of foreign life and travel, as he lived for a year in Italy (Sicily) and then taught English in Japan (Hiroshima). At present, D. Mitchell lives in Ireland. He has written nine novels, two of which, *number9dream* (2001) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004), were shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

Mitchel is a holder of several important literary awards, among which there are several Commonwealth Writers Prizes, the 2001 James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and the Guardian First Book Award (1999).

In his first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999), there are nine narrators in nine different places in the world. Their stories are intricately interconnected. One of the narrators is the so-called "noncorpum," an inbeing or spirit that flits from one body to another. The stories have very different events in them, but in the final chapter, when simultaneously mingled in the mind of one of the narrators, they create a surreal picture for a survivor from a terrorist attack wondering about the separation of what is real and what is "ghostly".

Starting from that first novel, Mitchel set himself an aim: to create a textual universe, to write the whole world into his novels. Since the first book, some characters keep reappearing from novel to novel. Mitchell's novels also exhibit the influence of Buddhist philosophy. Besides, one of the frequent motifs is a young person's quest. Thus, in the novel with an unusual title *number9dream*, a young boy Eiji Miyake, takes a journey, which is both geographical and spiritual, to find out his father's identity following his rather traumatic childhood. The quest takes him to modern day Tokyo and plunges him into a half-imaginary and half-criminal surrounding. The novel's author admitted that the central enigma he was trying to resolve through the narration is the enigma of the mind: what is it? Where is it situated and how does it function?

In *Cloud Atlas*, there is a kaleidoscope of six different interlaced stories spanning several centuries. They also "mirror-reflect" each other in the chain of events.

Mitchell's recent novels are *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), *The Bone Clocks* (2013) and *Slade House* (2015). These are "romances" picturing international and intercultural liaisons. The questions presented for the reader's reflection involve considering love as the opposition of different poles, love's obsession with the unobtainable object, the sense of risk and resulting adrenalin. Love stories are masterfully entwined with commerce, trade and business, religion, captivity and pursuit.

The novel *Black Swan Green*, like a number of other narratives by Mitchell, is also written in the first-person mode, and the storyteller is a teenage boy, whose most sensitive childhood years are spent in a small village in Worcestershire. The events are spread through the year 1982, which is of historical importance as well – it is the time of the Falklands War and the punk rock era, and Margaret Thatcher's Prime Minister years. Jason Taylor, the main character and narrator, is a shy stammering boy of a comprehensive school whose teenage experience is muddled and traumatic: he is a target for bullies because of his stammering and his poetic nature; his parents' relationship is nearly collapsing; his love for a girl is typically sensitive and painful; and he has to bear his elder sister's casual insults.

The novel blends together the Ich-Roman, Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman, and for the most part, it is a novel of maturity, or growing up. Jason Taylor may be juxtaposed with a number of teen-narrators in the Anglophone fiction: Stephen Dedalus (in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916), Holden Caulfield (in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951), Adrian Mole (in Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13¾*, 1982) – to name but a few most notable examples. It is a naïve and traumatic narrative, due to a child's limited perspective and personal problems.

With each chapter, there comes an important formative experience for Jason in every month described. Of special poignancy is the father/son relationship. A "collection" of fathers comes into view: the one ready to fight for the honour of his family, the one who is a bitter drunk, the one who beats his wife for the loss of several postage stamps "so black and blue, the hospital had to feed her through a tube for a week", and Jason's father facing sacking and divorce.

Jason witnesses his dad's moral crush. Even without the reported information about his loss of job due to the public discovery of adultery and imminent divorce, we follow Jason's subtle powers of observation to suspect the degree of his father's fall. The author strongly emphasizes the contrast between a successful businessman at the beginning of the novel and an ordinary drab citizen "eating chips with a wooden fork from a cone of newspaper".

Sigmund Freud's assertion – "What began in relation to the father is completed in relation to the group" – may highlight the cultural layer of the novel. Simultaneously, D. H. Lawrence's words – "Man needs a quiet, gentle father who uses his authority in the name of living life" – hint at a possible cure the novel implies through its verbalized psychology.

Discussion

1. How is the novel structured?
2. In the novel, some names and realia are significant for understanding the main ideas. Find out the meaning of the title "Black Swan Green" and "Hangman". Which other names do you think are important?
3. Describe these characters:
   - Jayson Taylor
   - Jason's parents
   - Dean Moran
   - Rox Wilcox
   - Dawn Madden
4. Explain the role of the Falklands War in the context of the novel.
5. Explain what makes *Black Swan Green* the novel of maturing.
6. How is the problem of bullying addressed in the book?
7. Make a list of teenage jargon words. Why is it important for Jason to use them? What is his attitude to this?
8. How does the author present the sensitive inner world of a thirteen-year-old boy?
9. Can the ending of the novel – Jason stepping into an unknown future in a different school and away from his broken family – be considered realistic / healing / adequate / impossible / unwelcome?

In this episode, Jason Taylor comes to Madame Crommelynck, editor of the local parish journal where Jason would like to publish his poems. He comes to see her as she wishes to talk to the "author" who submits his work under a pseudonym. Comment on the main ontological issues raised here. How effectively does Mitchell use humour? Do you find the episode humorous? Why?

"So. Do I learn today your true name, or do I still give hospitality to a stranger who hides behind a ridiculous pseudonym?"

Hangman was even stopping me from saying "Sorry." I got so het up and desperate and angry I blurted out "Sorry!" anyway, but so loud it sounded really rude.

"Your elegant apology does not answer my question."

I mumbled, "Jason Taylor" and wanted to cry.

"Jay Who? Pronounce it clearly! My ears are as old as me! I do not have microphones hidden to collect every little word!"

I hated my name. "Jason Taylor." Flavorless as chewed receipts.

"If you are an 'Adolf Coffin,' or a 'Pius Broomhead,' I comprehend. But why hide 'Jason Taylor' under an inaccessible symbolist and a Latin American revolutionary?"

My huh? must've shown.

"Eliot! T. S.! Bolivar! Simón!"

"'Eliot Bolivar' just sounded more ... poetic."

"What is more poetic than 'Jason,' an Hellenic hero? Who foundationed European literature if not the ancient Greeks? Not Eliot's coterie of thiefs of graves, I assure you! And what is a poet if he is not a tailor of words? Poets and tailors join what nobody else can join. Poets and tailors conceal their craft in their craft. No, I do not accept your answer. I believe the truth is, you use your pseudonym because your poetry is a shameful secret. I am correct?"

"'Shameful' isn't the exact word, exactly."

"Oh, so what is the exact word, exactly?"

"Writing poetry's" – I looked around the solarium, but Madame Crommelynck's got a tractor beam – "sort of ... gay."

" 'Gay'? A merry activity?"

This was hopeless. "Writing poems is ... what creeps and poofters do."

"So you are one of these 'creeps'?"

"No."

"Then you are a 'poof-ter', whatever one is?"

"No!"

"Then your logic is eluding me."

"If you're dad's a famous composer and your mum's an aristocrat, you can do things that you can't do if your dad works at Greenland Supermarkets and if you go to a comprehensive school. Poetry's one of those things."

"Aha! Truth! You are afraid the hairy barbarians will not accept you in their tribe if you write poetry."

"That's more or less it, yeah . . ."

"More? Or less? Which is the exact word, exactly?"

(She's a pain sometimes.) "That's it. Exactly."

"And you wish to become an hairy barbarian?"

"I'm a kid. I'm thirteen. You said it's a miserable age, being thirteen, and you're right. If you don't fit in, they make your life a misery. Like Floyd Chaceley or Nicholas Briar."

"Now you are talking like a real poet."

"I don't understand it when you say stuff like that!"

(Mum'd've gone, Don't talk to me in that tone of voice!)

"I mean" – Madame Crommelynck almost looked pleased – "you are entirely of your words."

"What does that mean?"

"You are being quintessentially truthful."

"Anyone can be truthful."

"About superficialities, Jason, yes, is easy. About pain, no, is not. So you want a double life. One Jason Taylor who seeks approval of hairy barbarians. Another Jason Taylor is Eliot Bolivar, who seeks approval of the literary world."

"Is that so impossible?"

"If you wish to be a versifier," she answered, whirlpooling her wine, "very possible. If you are a true artist" – she schwurked wine round her mouth – "absolutely never. If you are not truthful to the world about who and what you are, your art will stink of falsenesses."

I had no answer for that.

"Nobody knows of your poems? A teacher? A confidant?"

"Only you, actually."

Madame Crommelynck's eyes've got this glint. It's nothing to do with outside light. "You hide your poetry from your lover?"

"No," I said. "I, uh, don't."

"Don't hide your poetry or don't have a lover?"

"I don't have a girlfriend."

Quick as a chess-clock thumper, she said, "You prefer boys?"

I still can't believe she said that. (Yes I can.) "I'm normal!"

Her drumming fingers on the pile of parish magazines said, Normal?

"I do like this one girl, actually," I blurted out, to prove it. "Dawn Madden. But she's already got a boyfriend."

"Oho? And the boyfriend of Dawn Madden, he is a poet or a barbarian?" (She loved how she'd tricked Dawn Madden's name out of me.)

"Ross Wilcox's a prat, not a poet. But if you're going to suggest that I write a poem to Dawn Madden, no way. I'd be the village laughingstock."

"Absolutely, if you compose derivative verses of cupids and cliché, Miss Madden will remain with her 'prat' and you will justly earn derision. But if a poem is beauty and truth, your Miss Madden will treasure your words more than money, more than certificates. Even when she is as old as I. Especially when she is as old as I."

"But." I ducked the subject. "Don't heaps of artists use pseudonyms?"

"Who?"

"Um . . ." Only Cliff Richard and Sid Vicious came to mind.

A phone started ringing.

"True poetry is truth. Truth is not popular, so poetry also is not."

"But ... truth about what?"

"Oh, the life, the death, the heart, memory, time, cats, fear. Anything." (The butler didn't seem to be answering the phone either.) "Truth is everywhere, like seeds of trees; even deceits contain elements of truth. But the eye is clouded by the quotidian, by prejudice, by worryings, scandal, predation, passion, ennui, and, worst, television. Despicable machine. Television was here in my solarium. When I arrived. I throwed it in the cellar. It was watching me. A poet throws all but truth in the cellar. Jason. There is a matter?"

"Er ... your phone's ringing."

"I know a phone is ringing! It can go to the hell! I am talking to you!" (My parents'd run into a burning asbestos mine if they thought there was a phone ringing for them.) "0ne week before, we agreed 'What is beauty?' is a question unanswerable, yes? So today, a greater mystery. If an art is true, if an art is free of falseness, it is, a priori, beautiful."

I tried to digest that.

(The phone finally gave up.)

"Your best poem in here" – she rifled through the parish magazines – "is your 'Hangman.' It has pieces of truth of your speech impediment, I am right?"

A familiar shame burnt from my neck, but I nodded.

2.12. Sebastian Faulks. *A Week in December* (2009)

Sebastian Faulks was born in 1953 in Donnington, England. He was educated at Wellington College and Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He began his career as a schoolteacher, and then switched over to journalism. Even though he is a professional writer now, he still contributes articles and reviews to a number of newspapers and magazines.

Faulks' first literary award was the 1994 British Book Awards, and he became the Author of the Year receiving another prize of this kind for popular fiction in 2009. He is also the recipient of the 1998 James Tait Black Memorial Prize. He was listed for the 2016 Tolstoy Prize, Moscow.

Faulks is a versatile author. He experimented with modernist, postmodernist and classical realist modes of writing. Among his most acclaimed novels, is *The Girl at the Lion d'Or* (1989) which is a part of the so-called The French (Charles Hartmann) Trilogy (the other two are *Birdsong*, 1993, and *Charlotte Gray*, 1999).

The setting of these novels is France between the First and Second World Wars. In the first book of the trilogy, the author tells the story of a difficult life of a country girl who comes to work in a big city just after World War I. This novel follows the conventions of realism and raises poignant social issues. *Birdsong* relates the story of a young Englishman, Stephen Wraysford, and the narration is permeated with chapters about the main hero's granddaughter, Elizabeth, who travels to France to discover the history of her grandfather, his fighting in World War I. The novel was made into a television series. In *Charlotte Gray* Faulks depicts a young Scottish woman who becomes involved with the French resistance during the Second World War.

Faulks often turns to the stories of love, and one of them is the novel *On Green Dolphin Street* (2001). The writer also put his interest into consciousness studies, mind sciences and neurobiology. As a result, his two novels *Human Traces* (2005) and *Engleby* (2007) deal with mental disorders, psychological theories, discoveries in psychiatry and related sciences.

Devil May Care (2008) is a novel that was written for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ian Fleming, the creator of the legendary James Bond character. In this novel, Bond investigates the case of a megalomaniac chemist with a deep-seated hatred of England.

A Week in December (2009) is a novel written in a Dickensian manner of Victorian fiction. The recent novels *Where My Heart Used to Beat* (2015), *Paris Echo* (2018) and *Snow Country* (2021) are the novels that collect all the recurring themes of Sebastian Faulks' fiction – wars of the 20th century, stark reality of life, especially of the underprivileged and socially vulnerable, love, adventure and the human mind. Critics claim that these books reflect the whole of the 20th century.

A Week in December is based on the chronotope, that features the London of 2007, just a week before Christmas. The duration of the events is limited to about 7 days. The reader follows the lives of seven characters who are initially unacquainted with each other or not closely related. However, in the course of events, very different personalities, people of various social, cultural, religious and ethnic origins appear to be connected like in a web. We follow the lives of quite recognizable social and psychological types: a callous financier, a well-read and inquisitive intellectual, young people making their first independent steps in life – through hard work, determination – or through sponging, meandering between social and religious concerns or by just idling the time away and de-socializing in computer games, a religious adept, a footballer, a housewife, a millionaire and others. The characters meet, get to know each other, interact – thus revealing the underlying themes: moneymaking, the onset of the electronic age and its grievous effects, society's misbalance, religion and fanaticism, ethnic cultures, labour and life standards. The novel starts with an MP's wife preparation for a dinner party, and it actually ends with the party.

Discussion

1. How is the plot of the novel composed? How many storylines are there? Relate each of them.
2. What areas of social life are represented? Does the author express any attitude to the social problems depicted?
3. Which events have the most striking effect on you?
4. Make up character profiles of these personages; use the information about their background and activities, appearance, habits, speech and thoughts:
   - John Veals
   - Gabriel Northwood
   - Hassan al-Rashid
   - Tadeusz Borowski
   - Ralph Tranter
5. What stylistic features of the novel can refer it to realism? Is it classical realist fiction or neo-realism?
6. Make a list of essential ideas expressed in the novel. What literary techniques does the author use to get these ideas across to the readers?

These episodes represent some of the brightest and most significant moments in the life of the novel's characters. Place these scenes in their contexts.

a) All of Vanessa's family were mysterious to her, though none more than her husband. She often wondered at the way John seemed so exactly suited to the modern world. It was something to do with tunnel vision, she thought, of being unaware of contingency.

She herself had read psychology at university, trained as a lawyer in London, then worked for a petroleum company in New York, before finding a position with a charitable foundation; this was what she had been doing when she met John Veals with his then colleague Nicky Barbieri on Long Island. So for a time in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vanessa Whiteway had been on the edge of the financial world and had seen how it transformed itself.

The essential change seemed to her quite simple: bankers had detached their activities from the real world. Instead of being a 'service' industry – helping companies who had a function in the life of their society – banking became a closed system. Profit was no longer related to growth or increase, but became self-sustaining; and in this semi-virtual world, the amount of money to be made by financiers also became unhitched from normal logic.

It followed, Vanessa thought, that the people who could flourish here must themselves be, in some profound and personal way, detached. They could have no qualms about the effects of what they did; no cares for the collateral impact – although, to do them justice, they did take precautions to minimise the possibility of any contact with reality; indeed the joy of the new products was exactly their magical self-sufficiency, the way they appeared to eliminate the risk of any final reckoning. However, it remained necessary for these people to have – or to develop very quickly – a very limited sense of 'the other'; a kind of functional autism was the ideal state of mind.

And in addition to this, there must be a passionate faith: they had to believe that theirs was the true system and that earlier beliefs had been heretical. Where there were doubts, they had to be excised; where there were qualifications, they needed to be cauterised. A breed of fanatic was born, and Vanessa saw them with her own blue eyes. She met them at off-site bonding sessions in Florida, at charity dinners and – dog-tired and wind-burned – at the end of golfing weekends in Scotland. Although she wasn't there for the lectures or the golf or the drinking, and glimpsed them only at the lobby or the airport, she could tell that these loners had reinforced one another's beliefs over the three days away; that by the end of their exhausting rituals they were reinvigorated in their faith – convinced they needed nothing and nobody beyond their own fantastic circuitry.

What intrigued Vanessa about John was how easily he had fitted into the required psychological profile. To hear him talk of his North London childhood, you would have foreseen nothing so extraordinary; his school performance was unremarkable and his family had neither 'spoiled' nor bullied him. There were no 'formative' incidents that made him set his face against the world, no early loss or trauma for which he needed to compensate.

In fact, when she thought about John, Vanessa found the whole toolbox of her undergraduate psychology classes to be useless. There was no 'compensation', no subliminal desires or re-enactments. What there was, in her view, was a simple and unmotivated collision of two things: the way these new financiers were by nature, and the way the world, for the first time ever, had indulged them.

Some people thought the crux of it was the invention of some credit derivative products by a few people at J. P. Morgan; but in fact, in Vanessa's mind, the key was that society as a whole in London and New York had so lost its bearings that it was prepared to believe, with these analysts, that cause and effect could be uncoupled. To her, this social change, the result of decades of assault on long-accepted norms, was far more interesting than the quasi-autistic intellects of the people, like John, who worked in the new finance.

Very occasionally, these individuals were compelled to interact with society – most notably when it looked as though politicians might regulate them;

then for a moment they were required to leave their cloister and dirty their hands in the world. The largest cheque that John Veals had ever written was to a political lobbying firm in Washington when he, and the bank for whom he was then working, feared that credit derivatives might be the subject of government regulation. They had contributed $3 million to the fees of the key lobbyist on Capitol Hill.

One other moment came to Vanessa's mind, one other instance when her husband had collided with the old world of obligation and debt that he had outgrown. It came when she accompanied him to a function addressed, quite recently, by the British Prime Minister. What had it been? A Lord Mayor's dinner? The opening of a bank's offices in Canary Wharf? She could no longer remember. What she could recall clearly was the way the Prime Minister lowered his voice with the stagey vibrato that politicians used to convey 'sincerity' and, congratulating the assembled financiers, had said words to the effect that: 'What you have done for the City of London, we now intend to do for the entire British economy.'

She looked at John and thought he was going to faint. All colour had left his face and he was holding hard to the edge of the table. She put her hand on his. At first, she thought he was appalled at the idea that his own circle's understanding of the world was about to be stolen and made public by a man who was not really of their faith. Later, she understood that the loss of blood was, paradoxically, his way of blushing: of betraying shame.

She had never seen a trace of it again – of shame, or doubt, or the embarrassment of reconnection with the world; it was all over in that moment.

And when little Sophie Topping asked her if she still 'loved' her husband, it was not a question that Vanessa felt she could answer. How could you 'love' such a man? 'What makes him tick?' 'What does he enjoy?' 'When you're alone, what does he ...?' None of these were questions to which Vanessa could give an answer, because her husband had long ago migrated to a place where such matters had no meaning.

66 99 b) One night after lectures in his first term, Hassan found himself by chance at a meeting of the Left Student Group. One of the third years was giving a talk called 'Multiculturalism: the Broken Dream' and something in the title appealed to Hassan.

The speaker was a scrawny white Londoner with a fluent manner.

'The advertisement read as follows,' he said, leaning forward to the lectern and adjusting his glasses as he looked down at a piece of paper. '"We are trying to recruit from all sections of the community. Because of the specific nature of the work, the number of self-confessed Jews we can appoint will be subject to certain limitations."'

He lifted the piece of paper and shook it at his audience. 'And this,' he said, 'is not the product of some neo-Nazi dictatorship, this is from a local council in our very own capital. Yes. Think about that.'

The audience thought about it, and didn't like it.

'And yes,' said the speaker, 'the wording has been modified by me, with "self-confessed Jews" instead of "gay men", but, it should be stressed, that is the only amendment. Not good, is it?'

There was a murmur of assent.

'What was the advertisement for?' said Hassan.

'Not sure,' said the student next to him. 'Some sort of youth team leaders, I think.'

'Have these people already forgotten who went into the gas chambers at Belsen and Auschwitz?' said the speaker. 'Not only the Jews, but tens of thousands of gypsies and what the local council in question would doubtless call "self-confessed homosexuals". We must fight homophobia wherever it appears. It is a virus as vicious as racism. In fact, homophobia is racism.'

Hassan had given little thought to homosexuality. No one he knew in Glasgow had admitted to being gay, and the teaching of the Koran on this matter hardly encouraged debate. Meanwhile, the speaker's voice was rising: '... and such views are symptomatic of a much wider and deeper hostility and intolerance of otherness. Only last week, a London evening paper felt able to sponsor a debate entitled "Is Islam good for London?" Do another substitution here and imagine the reaction if Judaism had been the subject. Are Jews good for London? You just can't picture that question being posed in a civilised society. Yet there are still those who claim that Islamophobia can't be racist, because Islam is a religion not a race! They're fooling themselves. A religion is not only about faith but also about identity, background and culture. As we know, the Muslim community is overwhelmingly non-white. Therefore Islamophobia is racist – and so is anti-Semitism.'

Hassan was aware that a kind of slip of logic had taken place in the last two sentences – perhaps that a part and a whole had swapped places, or that an implied 'moreover' had become a 'therefore' – but he couldn't put his finger on it. What he could see was that the flapping dove had been pulled from the conjuror's top hat and so, like the others, he applauded. He was against racism, and homophobia and Islamophobia. He didn't see how he could not be.

Soon, Hassan became a regular at the LSG meetings. They talked about things that had previously troubled him in a peripheral, unformed way; but what was most attractive to him was that the LSG seemed to have an answer to all these uncertainties – a unified explanation of everything. In this way, he thought, it was itself a bit like a religion. When you went to the imam, he could answer all your questions; that, for believers, was the point of him. Presumably it was the same

with the Christians and the Jews: no religion would offer partial solutions or offer help on only some of the big issues, while admitting that on the others it hadn't a clue. So it was with the LSG. Once you'd got into their way of thinking, there was nothing it couldn't explain: everything could be seen as the wish of the powerful to exploit the weak. As a template for understanding the world, it drew its strength from the fact that it was grounded on the basest part of human nature – the only thing that defined the species: power. Power expressed through money. But really just power. The other attractive thing about the LSG view of the world was that, once you'd cracked it, it was instantly practicable. It was as though after a one-week correspondence course you could sight-read all music, from 'Frère Jacques' to Scarlatti.

c) Gabriel Northwood spent Wednesday morning with his feet up on the desk reading the Koran.

'What a bastard,' he muttered under his breath from time to time. 'What a bastard ...'

He had always thought of the Old Testament as giving the most implacable and unsympathetic portrayal of a divinity. Jahweh, or Jehovah, the god of the Jews and their Exodus and their dietary laws and bloody battles against the other Semitic tribes; Jahweh the god of exile, punishment, bloodshed, plagues and slaying of the firstborn ... He had surely set a standard of intransigence. Yet compared to the Koranic divinity, he was beginning to feel, old Jahweh was almost avuncular.

The god of the Koran brought with him neither the great stories of the Old Testament (though he referred back to them) nor the modern life-guide of the New. What he did offer was his own words, ipsissima verba, mouthed by the Angel Gabriel, remembered and transcribed verbatim by the Prophet. And over nearly 400 pages, the principal message seemed a simple one: believe in me or burn for all eternity. Page after page.

Woeful punishment awaits the unbelievers. Shameful punishment awaits the unbelievers. For the unbelievers we have prepared chains and fetters, and a blazing Fire. Would that you knew what this is like. It is a scorching Fire. Woe betide every back-biting slanderer who amasses riches and sedulously hoards them, thinking his wealth will render him immortal! By no means! He shall be flung to the Destroying Flame. But if he is an erring disbeliever, his welcome will be scalding water, and he will burn in Hell. We shall sternly punish the unbelievers. The Fire shall for ever be their home.

You could open the book at random. It was the same message on any page. 'Consider the fate of the evildoers.' The phrase tolled like a stuck muezzin.

For the believers, on the other hand, there awaited 'dark-eyed virgins in their tents whom neither man nor jinnee will have touched before ... Virgins as fair as corals and rubies ... They shall recline on couches ranged in rows. To dark-eyed houris we shall wed them.'

The life choice laid down by the Prophet was what Delilah in the clerks' room called, to Eustace Hutton's irritation, a 'nobrainer'. Anyone, Gabriel thought, would take the virgin option over hellfire – any man, at least; it wasn't clear what was on offer to women. What the book lacked was any reasoning or evidence to support its depiction of this radically divided afterlife.

Jehovah had parted the Red Sea. He had destroyed the cities of the plain. He had spoken in the ears of the prophets. He had visited plagues on the enemies of the Israelites. Jesus had performed miracles to demonstrate his own divinity; he had invented a revolutionary manner of behaving – kindly. He had walked on water. He had risen from the dead. Allah, on the other hand, had not condescended to intervene on earth or to argue his case. He didn't bother to persuade; in his single apparition he had offered only warning. Believe in me or die.

After 200 pages, Gabriel found a great weariness come over him. And there was also something in the self-grounded and unargued certainty of the Koran that reminded him of something else, of someone he knew. A voice. He couldn't at that moment put a name to it.

He had read somewhere that the Arabs had felt excluded from monotheism because, several hundred years into it, they had still had no directly instructed prophet of their own; it appeared that their Jewish and Christian trading partners even taunted them for this lack. When the Prophet finally arrived, it was 600 years after second-placed Jesus Christ had been and gone: a lapse of time as great as 1400 to the present day. That was an awfully long time in the short history of monotheism, Gabriel thought, to be viewed by your neighbours as backward. And sometimes the fierce iterations of the book seemed to show the effect of those pent-up centuries of hope and silence. Here is the god at last. And after all this time, he'd better be emphatic.

But perhaps, Gabriel thought, his view of the book was too legalistic or pedantic. After all, there was a lot of rubbish in Deuteronomy and Leviticus: 'A man who has had his testicles cut off cannot be admitted to the presence of Jahweh ...' But the Jews had moved on. They and the Christians accepted that their holy books had been written by humans, albeit inspired by God, and the great majority were happy to see the words in the context of their time and had little trouble in squaring them with modern knowledge, provided they could just be left with a comforting sense of a higher power who took an interest in their affairs before and after death.

But as far as Gabriel understood it, Islam had never yielded that ground. Once an early theological debate had decided for all time that the Koran was literally and in every syllable the unmediated word of God, then all Muslims became by definition 'fundamentalist'. It was by its nature unlike Judaism or Christianity; it was intrinsically, and quite unapologetically, a fundamentalist religion. There was, of course, a world of difference between 'fundamental' and 'militant' – let alone 'aggressive'; but the intractable truth remained: that by being so pure, so high-minded and so uncompromising, Islam had limited the kind of believer it could claim.

2.13. Hilary Mantel. *Woolf Hall* (2009)

Hilary Mantel was born in Derbyshire, England. She studied at the London School of Economics and at Sheffield University. Her first employment was as a social worker, which made her stay in such countries as Botswana and Saudi Arabia, and later she worked as a film critic.

Her writing career began with the novel *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985). Her subjects in literature are history, personal memoirs, a life of a human being in hard circumstances. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988) combines these themes. There are also topics related to religious conflicts, which continue in *Fludd* (1956) and later – in *An Experiment in Love* (1996).

Mantel's first novel of the historical genre was *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) dedicated to the events of the French revolution of 1789 and featuring its main leaders in the entirety of their lives.

Family issues are always interwoven in Mantel's narratives, and they are always part of some larger social turmoil, like it happens in *A Change of Climate* (1994), *An Experiment in Love*. In *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998), she also combines the life of a real person in the 18th century with elements of violence and mythical references. This takes the novelist further, and in *Beyond Black* (2005) she explores an intense psychic condition of a certain Alison Hart, a medium.

Mantel's reputation nevertheless rests on her historical trilogy: *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) and *The Mirror and the Light* (2020). They feature the times of King Henry VIII's rule, and the central character and narrating voice is his minister Thomas Cromwell. The trilogy follows his career from rags to riches and power, his shrewd and ingenious political and religious activities, his role in the King's marriages and divorces, as well as his inevitable fall from grace and execution. A whole gallery of historical figures is presented with their intrigues, personal human concerns, touching revelations and deep philosophical reflections about the turbulent times and the eternal human values.

Among Mantel's numerous literary awards and honours, are the Orange Prize for Fiction (2006), Walter Scott Prize, 2010 (for *Wolf Hall*), several Costa Book Awards, and two Booker Prizes (for *Wolf Hall*, 2009, and for *Bring Up the Bodies*, 2012).

Hilary Mantel died in 2022.

The first novel in the trilogy, *Wolf Hall* is set in the 1500s and traces the rise to power of Thomas Cromwell. He is shown first in his early childhood, abused by his drunken and ruthless father who beats the boy to near unconsciousness. Thomas runs away from home, travels abroad and acquires worldly wisdom, education and great experience in many walks of life.

Back in England, Cromwell is a professional lawyer. By 1527, he is a well-travelled, married man, an affectionate father, a close friend and confidant of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (who later falls victim to Henry's marriage and divorce deals). Cromwell's personal life turns into a tragedy as he loses his wife and two daughters to a deadly disease. However, he exhibits an admirable human quality, adopting his nephew and giving home to a few poor orphan boys providing them not only with housing and food, but also with protection and fatherly affection.

Cromwell is forced to be involved in Henry's wild intention to divorce his first wife and marry Anne Boleyn, even if that leads to another wild resolution: to declare himself head of the English church and break from Rome.

Cromwell's exceptional diplomatic abilities, his sharp and far-seeing intellect win him further favours, respect and reliance of the King. However, the long desired legal heir that Anne promised to the King of England, is never born, and Henry begins to get angry and despondent. Cromwell nevertheless becomes most powerful of all Henry's ministers.

It is important to note that, drawing from historical document and Cromwell's numerous biographies, Mantel presents an alternative portrait of this personality: as a shrewd and wise, compassionate and reasonable man, a patriot of England and a progressive thinker of the Reformation.

Discussion

1. Place the events of the novel in their chronological order. Divide them into several groups: a) Thomas Cromwell's personal life; b) Cromwell's public activities; c) King Henry's life; d) Thomas More's life; e) the historical events in England.
2. Comment on the narrative mode in the novel. What techniques does the writer use to present the history of England through the mind of Cromwell? What effect on the reader does the present-tense narration have?
3. Comment on the laws and medieval conventions depicted in the novel, e.g. execution of heretics, prophesies, etc.
4. Make a character profile of Thomas Cromwell.
5. What portrayal of King Henry VIII is given in the novel?
6. Collect information about these historical and fictional characters and state their functions and roles in Tudor England:
   - Cromwell's wife Liz
   - Cromwell's children
   - Thomas Wolsey, the cardinal
   - Thomas Wriothesley
   - Thomas More

- Catharine of Aragon
- Anne Boleyn
- Thomas Wyatt, a poet
- Thomas Cranmer
- Eustache Chapuys
- Elizabeth Barton

7. Which episodes in the novel do you find impressive and memorable?
8. Comment on the means and methods the author depicts the flow of history?
9. Can you identify some central ideas in the novel?
10. What do you think will happen in the sequels *Bring Up the Bodies* and *The Mirror and the Light*?

Comment on these episodes from the novel. What are their larger contexts?

a) "So now get up."

Felled, dazed, silent, he has fallen; knocked full length on the cobbles of the yard. His head turns sideways; his eyes are turned toward the gate, as if someone might arrive to help him out. One blow, properly placed, could kill him now.

Blood from the gash on his head – which was his father's first effort – is trickling across his face. Add to this, his left eye is blinded; but if he squints sideways, with his right eye he can see that the stitching of his father's boot is unraveling. The twine has sprung clear of the leather, and a hard knot in it has caught his eyebrow and opened another cut.

"So now get up!" Walter is roaring down at him, working out where to kick him next. He lifts his head an inch or two, and moves forward, on his belly, trying to do it without exposing his hands, on which Walter enjoys stamping. "What are you, an eel?" his parent asks. He trots backward, gathers pace, and aims another kick.

It knocks the last breath out of him; he thinks it may be his last. His forehead returns to the ground; he lies waiting, for Walter to jump on him. The dog, Bella, is barking, shut away in an out house. I'll miss my dog, he thinks. The yard smells of beer and blood. Someone is shouting, down on the riverbank. Nothing hurts, or perhaps it's that everything hurts, because there is no separate pain that he can pick out. But the cold strikes him, just in one place: just through his cheekbone as it rests on the cobbles.

"Look now, look now," Walter bellows. He hops on one foot, as if he's dancing. "Look what I've done. Burst my boot, kicking your head."

Inch by inch. Inch by inch forward. Never mind if he calls you an eel or a worm or a snake. Head down, don't provoke him. His nose is clotted with blood

and he has to open his mouth to breathe. His father's momentary distraction at the loss of his good boot allows him the leisure to vomit. "That's right," Walter yells. "Spew everywhere." Spew everywhere, on my good cobbles. "Come on, boy, get up. Let's see you get up. By the blood of creeping Christ, stand on your feet."

Creeping Christ? he thinks. What does he mean? His head turns sideways, his hair rests in his own vomit, the dog barks, Walter roars, and bells peal out across the water. He feels a sensation of movement, as if the filthy ground has become the Thames. It gives and sways beneath him; he lets out his breath, one great final gasp. You've done it this time, a voice tells Walter. But he closes his ears, or God closes them for him. He is pulled downstream, on a deep black tide.

b) Thomas Cromwell is now a little over forty years old. He is a man of strong build, not tall. Various expressions are available to his face, and one is readable: an expression of stifled amusement. His hair is dark, heavy and waving, and his small eyes, which are of very strong sight, light up in conversation: so the Spanish ambassador will tell us, quite soon. It is said he knows by heart the entire New Testament in Latin, and so as a servant of the cardinal is apt – ready with a text if abbots flounder. His speech is low and rapid, his manner assured; he is at home in courtroom or waterfront, bishop's palace or inn yard. He can draft a contract, train a falcon, draw a map, stop a street fight, furnish a house and fix a jury. He will quote you a nice point in the old authors, from Plato to Plautus and back again. He knows new poetry, and can say it in Italian. He works all hours, first up and last to bed. He makes money and he spends it. He will take a bet on anything.

c) So the cardinal is relieved to be quitting the city, though he cannot embark without the entourage appropriate for a prince of the church. He must persuade King François of the efforts he should make, in Italy, to free Pope Clement by military action; he must assure François of the King of England's amity and assistance, but without committing any troops or funds. If God gives him a following wind, he will bring back not only an annulment, but a treaty of mutual aid between England and France, one which will make the young Emperor's large jaw quiver, and draw a tear from his narrow Habsburg eye.

So why is he not more cheerful, as he strides about his private chamber at York Place? 'What will I get, Cromwell, if I gain everything I ask? The queen, who does not like me, will be cast off and, if the king persists in his folly, the Boleyns brought in, who do not like me either; the girl has a spite against me, her father I've made a fool of for years, and her uncle, Norfolk, would see me dead in a ditch. Do you think this plague will be over by the time I return? They say these visitations are all from God, but I can't pretend to know his purposes. While I'm away you should get out of the city yourself.'

He sighs; is the cardinal his only work? No; he is just the patron who demands the most constant attendance. Business always increases. When he works for the cardinal, in London or elsewhere, he pays his own expenses and those of the staff he sends out on Wolsey business. The cardinal says, reimburse yourself, and trusts him to take a fair percentage on top; he doesn't quibble, because what is good for Thomas Cromwell is good for Thomas Wolsey – and vice versa. His legal practice is thriving, and he is able to lend money at interest, and arrange bigger loans, on the international market, taking a broker's fee. The market is volatile – the news from Italy is never good two days together – but as some men have an eye for horseflesh or cattle to be fattened, he has an eye for risk. A number of noblemen are indebted to him, not just for arranging loans, but for making their estates pay better. It is not a matter of exactions from tenants, but, in the first place, giving the landowner an accurate survey of land values, crop yield, water supply, built assets, and then assessing the potential of all these; next, putting in bright people as estate managers, and with them setting up an accounting system that makes yearly sense and can be audited. Among the city merchants, he is in demand for his advice on trading partners overseas. He has a sideline in arbitration, commercial disputes mostly, as his ability to assess the facts of a case and give a swift impartial decision is trusted here, in Calais and in Antwerp. If you and your opponent can at least concur on the need to save the costs and delays of a court hearing, then Cromwell is, for a fee, your man; and he has the pleasant privilege, often enough, of sending away both sides happy.

These are good days for him: every day a fight he can win. 'Still serving your Hebrew God, I see,' remarks Sir Thomas More. 'I mean, your idol Usury.' But when More, a scholar revered through Europe, wakes up in Chelsea to the prospect of morning prayers in Latin, he wakes up to a creator who speaks the swift patois of the markets; when More is settling in for a session of self-scourging, he and Rafe are sprinting to Lombard Street to get the day's exchange rates. Not that he sprints, quite; an old injury drags sometimes, and when he's tired a foot turns inward, as if he's walking back towards himself. People suggest it is the legacy of a summer with Cesare Borgia. He likes the stories they tell about him. But where's Cesare now? He's dead.

'Thomas Cromwell?' people say. 'That is an ingenious man. Do you know he has the whole of the New Testament by heart?' He is the very man if an argument about God breaks out; he is the very man for telling your tenants twelve good reasons why their rents are fair. He is the man to cut through some legal entanglement that's ensnared you for three generations, or talk your sniffling little daughter into the marriage she swears she will never make. With animals, women and timid litigants, his manner is gentle and easy; but he makes your creditors weep. He can converse with you about the Caesars or get you Venetian glassware at a very reasonable rate. Nobody can out-talk him, if he wants to talk. Nobody can

better keep their head, when markets are falling and weeping men are standing on the street tearing up letters of credit. 'Liz,' he says one night, 'I believe that in a year or two we'll be rich.'

She is embroidering shirts for Gregory with a black-work design; it's the same one the queen uses, for she makes the king''s shirts herself.

'If I were Katherine I'd leave the needle in them,' he says.

She grins. 'I know you would.'

Lizzie had grown silent and stern when he told her how the king had spoken, at the meeting with Katherine. He had told her they should separate, pending a judgment on their marriage; perhaps she would retire from court? Katherine had said no; she said that would not be possible; she said she would seek advice from canon lawyers, and that he, himself, should equip himself with better lawyers, and better priests; and then, after the shouting was done, the people with their ears pressed to the walls had heard Katherine crying. 'He doesn't like her crying.'

'Men say,' Liz reaches for her scissors, '"I can't endure it when women cry" – just as people say, "I can't endure this wet weather." As if it were nothing to do with the men at all, the crying. Just one of those things that happen.'

'I've never made you cry, have I?'

'Only with laughter,' she says.

Conversation fades into an easy silence; she is embroidering her own thoughts, he is plotting what to do with his money. He is supporting two young scholars, not belonging to the family, through Cambridge University; the gift blesses the giver. I could increase those endowments, he thinks, and – 'I suppose I should make a will,' he says.

She reaches out for his hand. 'Tom, don't die.'

'Good God, no, I'm not proposing it.'

He thinks, I may not be rich yet but I am lucky. Look how I got out from under Walter's boots, from Cesare's summer, and a score of bad nights in back alleys. Men, it is supposed, want to pass their wisdom to their sons; he would give a great deal to protect his own son from a quarter of what he knows. Where does Gregory's sweet nature come from? It must be the result of his mother's prayers. Richard Williams, Kat's boy, is sharp, keen and forward. Christopher, his sister Bet's boy, is clever and willing too. And then he has Rafe Sadler, whom he trusts as he would trust his son; it's not a dynasty, he thinks, but it's a start. And quiet moments like this are rare, because his house is full of people every day, people who want to be taken to the cardinal. There are artists looking for a subject. There are solemn Dutch scholars with books under their arms, and Lübeck merchants unwinding at length solemn Germanic jokes; there are musicians in transit tuning up strange instruments, and noisy conclaves of agents for the Italian banks; there are alchemists offering recipes and astrologers offering favourable fates, and lonely Polish fur traders who've

wandered by to see if someone speaks their language; there are printers, engravers, translators and cipherers; and poets, garden designers, cabalists and geometricians. Where are they tonight?

'Hush,' Liz says. 'Listen to the house.'

At first, there is no sound. Then the timbers creak, breathe. In the chimneys, nesting birds shuffle. A breeze blows from the river, faintly shivering the tops of trees. They hear the sleeping breath of children, imagined from other rooms. 'Come to bed,' he says.

The king can't say that to his wife. Or, with any good effect, to the woman they say he loves.

d) On the day of the trial, rivers breach their banks; the Thames itself rises, bubbling like some river in Hell, and washes its flotsam over the quays.

It's England against Rome, he says. The living against the dead.

Norfolk will preside. He tells him how it will be. The early counts in the indictment will be thrown out: they concern sundry words spoken, at sundry times, about the act and the oath, and More's treasonable conspiracy with Fisher – letters went between the two of them, but it seems those letters are now destroyed. 'Then on the fourth count, we will hear the evidence of the Solicitor General. Now, Your Grace, this will divert More, because he cannot see young Riche without working himself into a fit about his derelictions when he was a boy –' The duke raises an eyebrow. 'Drinking. Fighting. Women. Dice.'

Norfolk rubs his bristly chin. 'I have noticed, a soft-looking lad like that, he always does fight. To make a point, you see. Whereas we damned slab-faced old bruisers who are born with our armour on, there's no point we need to make.'

'Quite,' he says. 'We are the most pacific of men. My lord, please attend now. We don't want another mistake like Dacre. We would hardly survive it. The early counts will be thrown out. At the next, the jury will look alert. And I have given you a handsome jury.'

More will face his peers; Londoners, the merchants of the livery companies. They are experienced men, with all the city's prejudices. They have seen enough, as all Londoners have, of the church's rapacity and arrogance, and they do not take kindly to being told they are unfit to read the scriptures in their own tongue. They are men who know More and have known him these twenty years. They know how he widowed Lucy Petyt. They know how he wrecked Humphrey Monmouth's business, because Tyndale had been a guest at his house. They know how he has set spies in their households, among their apprentices whom they treat as sons, among the servants so familiar and homely that they hear every night their master's bedside prayers.

One name makes Audley hesitate: 'John Parnell? It might be taken wrong. You know he has been after More since he gave judgment against him in Chancery –'

'I know the case. More botched it, he didn't read the papers, too busy writing a billet-doux to Erasmus, or locking some poor Christian soul in his stocks at Chelsea. What do you want, Audley, do you want me to go to Wales for a jury, or up to Cumberland, or somewhere they think better of More? I must make do with London men, and unless I swear in a jury of newborns, I cannot wipe their memories clear.'

Audley shakes his head. 'I don't know, Cromwell.'

'Oh, he's a sharp fellow,' the duke says. 'When Wolsey came down, I said, mark him, he's a sharp fellow. You'd have to get up early in the morning to be ahead of him.'

* * *

The night before the trial, as he is going through his papers at the Austin Friars, a head appears around the door: a little, narrow London head with a close-shaved skull and a raw young face. 'Dick Purser. Come in.'

Dick Purser looks around the room. He keeps the snarling bandogs who guard the house by night, and he has not been in here before. 'Come here and sit. Don't be afraid.' He pours him some wine, into a thin Venetian glass that was the cardinal's.

'Try this. Wiltshire sent it to me, I don't make much of it myself.'

Dick takes the glass and juggles it dangerously. The liquid is pale as straw or summer light. He takes a gulp. 'Sir, can I come in your train to the trial?'

'It still smarts, does it?' Dick Purser was the boy whom More had whipped before the household at Chelsea, for saying the host was a piece of bread. He was a child then, he is not much more now; when he first came to Austin Friars, they say he cried in his sleep. 'Get yourself a livery coat,' he says. 'And remember to wash your hands and face in the morning. I don't want you to disgrace me.'

It is the word 'disgrace' that works on the child. 'I hardly minded the pain,' he says. 'We have all had, saving you sir, as much if not worse from our fathers.'

'True,' he says. 'My father beat me as if I were a sheet of metal.'

'It was that he laid my flesh bare. And the women looking on. Dame Alice. The young girls. I thought one of them might speak up for me, but when they saw me unbreached, I only disgusted them. It made them laugh. While the fellow was whipping me, they were laughing.'

In stories it is always the young girls, innocent girls, who stay the hand of the man with the rod or the axe. But we seem to have strayed into a different story: a child's thin buttocks dimpling against the cold, his skinny little balls, his shy prick shrinking to a button, while the ladies of the house giggle and the menservants jeer, and the thin weals spring out against his skin and bleed.

'It's done and forgotten now. Don't cry.' He comes from behind his desk. Dick Purser drops his shorn head against his shoulder and bawls, in shame, in relief, in triumph that soon he will have outlived his tormentor. More did John Purser to death, he harassed him for owning German books; he holds the boy,

feeling the jump of his pulses, his stiff sinews, the ropes of his muscles, and makes sounds of comfort, as he did to his children when they were small, or as he does to a spaniel whose tail has been trodden on. Comfort is often, he finds, imparted at the cost of a flea or two.

'I will follow you to the death,' the boy declares. His arms, fists clenched, grip his master: knuckles knead his spine. He sniffs. 'I think I will look well in a livery coat. What time do we start?'

Early. With his staff he is at Westminster Hall before anybody else, vigilant for last-minute hitches. The court convenes around him, and when More is brought in, the hall is visibly shocked at his appearance. The Tower was never known to do a man good, but he startles them, with his lean person and his ragged white beard, looking more like a man of seventy than what he is. Audley whispers, 'He looks as if he has been badly handled.'

'And he says I never miss a trick.'

'Well, my conscience is clear,' the Lord Chancellor says breezily. 'He has had every consideration.'

John Parnell gives him a nod. Richard Riche, both court official and witness, gives him a smile. Audley asks for a seat for the prisoner, but More twitches to the edge of it: keyed up, combative.

He glances around to check that someone is taking notes for him.

Words, words, just words.

He thinks, I remembered you, Thomas More, but you didn't remember me. You never even saw me coming.

2.14. Jonathan Franzen. *Freedom* (2010)

Jonathan Franzen was born in 1959 in Western Springs, Illinois. He got his degree in German from Swarthmore College, and after intense overseas language practice he pursued a career as a novelist.

Franzen's first novel, *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988) was a literary dialogue with the great postmodernist authors. In his next book, *Strong Motion* (1992), he turned to the problems of family, and in *The Corrections* (2001) and *Freedom* (2010), he continues this motif. In his latest novels, *Purity* (2015) and *Crossroads: A Novel* (2021), he uses some of his previous techniques, such as collections of life stories of characters of various age groups, and book sections relating family life, memorable events spanning decades of late 20th century.

Franzen is known to take a sharp interest in all social issues of our contemporary life: he often expresses his concern about the state of literature in our age, the dangers of electronic communication and the ephemeral nature of electronic books.

Freedom follows the lives of the Berglund family, particularly the parents Patty and Walter, as their lives develop and then their happiness falls apart. Important to their story is a college friend of Walter's and successful rock musician, Richard Katz, who has a love affair with Patty. Walter and Patty's son Joey also goes through his own coming-of-age challenges. This novel follows the plot of the previous one – *The Corrections*.

Discussion

1. What is the novel's composition? How does the author entitle the sections and why?
2. What do the flashbacks reveal about Walter's and Patty's lives?
3. How well does the author reveal the problems of teenagers? Why do they rebel against their parents?
4. How does the author present the problem, the reasons and the consequences of a family break-up on the example of the Berglunds?
5. Which episodes in the novel are most dramatic? Explain your choice.
6. What are the features of literary realism in the novel?
7. Comment on the novel's ending. How credible is it? Does it contribute to the author's main idea?

Read the following episode and comment on the problems raised, the main images and the style.

There are many ways for a house cat to die outdoors, including dismemberment by coyotes and flattening by a car, but when the Hoffbauer family's beloved pet Bobby failed to come home one early-June evening, and no amount of calling Bobby's name or searching the perimeter of Canterbridge Estates or walking up and down the county road or stapling Bobby's xeroxed image to local trees turned up any trace of him, it was widely assumed on Canterbridge Court that Bobby had been killed by Walter Berglund.

Canterbridge Estates was a new development, consisting of twelve spacious homes in the modern many-bathroomed style, on the southwest side of a minor water now officially called Canterbridge Estates Lake. Though the lake wasn't close to anything, really, the nation's financial system had lately been lending out money essentially for free, and the building of the Estates, as well as the widening and paving of the road that led to it, had momentarily stirred the stagnant Itasca County economy. Low interest rates had also then enabled various Twin Cities

retirees and young local families, including the Hoffbauers, to buy themselves a dream home. When they began moving in, during the fall of 2007, their street still looked very raw. The front and back yards were lumpy and furzed over with unthriving grass, scattered with intractable glacial boulders and such birches as had been spared felling, and resembled, all in all, a child's too-hastily completed school terrarium project. The cats of the new neighborhood understandably preferred to stalk the woods and thickets of the adjoining Berglund property, where the birds were. And Walter, even before the last Canterbridge house was occupied, had gone door to door to introduce himself and ask his new neighbors to please keep their cats inside.

Walter was a good Minnesotan and reasonably friendly, but there was something about him, a political trembling in his voice, a fanatic gray stubble on his cheeks, that rubbed the families on Canterbridge Court the wrong way. Walter lived by himself in a dumpy, secluded old vacation house, and although it was undoubtedly nicer for the families to look across the lake at his scenic property than for him to look at their bare yards, and although a few of them did stop to imagine how noisy the construction of their homes must have been, nobody enjoys feeling like an intruder on somebody else's idyll. They'd paid their money, after all; they had a right to be there. Indeed, their property taxes were collectively hugely higher than Walter's, and most of them were facing a ballooning of their mortgage payments and were living on fixed incomes or saving for their children's educations. When Walter, who obviously had no such worries, came to complain to them about their cats, they felt they understood his worry about birds a lot better than he understood what a hyper-refined privilege it was to worry about them. Linda Hoffbauer, who was Evangelical and the most political person on the street, was especially offended. "So Bobby kills birds," she said to Walter. "So what?"

"Well, the thing is," Walter said, "small cats aren't native to North America, and so our songbirds never evolved any defenses against them. It's not really a fair fight."

"Cats kill birds," Linda said. "It's what they do, it's just part of nature."

"Yes, but cats are an Old World species," Walter said. "They're not part of our nature. They wouldn't be here if we hadn't introduced them. That's the whole problem."

"To be honest with you," Linda said, "all I care about is letting my children learn to take care of a pet and have responsibility for it. Are you trying to tell me they can't do that?"

"No, of course not," Walter said. "But you already keep Bobby indoors in the winter. I'm just asking that you do that in the summer, too, for the sake of the local ecosystem. We're living in an important breeding area for a number of bird species that are declining in North America. And those birds have children, too. When Bobby kills a bird in June or July, he's also leaving behind a nest full of babies that aren't going to live."

"The birds need to find someplace else to nest, then. Bobby loves running free outdoors. It's not fair to keep him indoors when the weather's nice."

"Sure. Yes. I know you love your cat. And if he would just stay in your yard, that would be fine. But this land actually belonged to the birds before it belonged to us. And it's not like there's any way that we can tell the birds that this is a bad place to try to nest. So they keep coming here, and they keep getting killed. And the bigger problem is that they're running out of space altogether, because there's more and more development. So it's important that we try to be responsible stewards to this wonderful land that we've taken over."

"Well, I'm sorry," Linda said, "but my children matter more to me than the children of some bird. I don't think that's an extreme position, compared to yours. God gave this world to human beings, and that's the end of the story as far as I'm concerned."

"I have children myself, and I understand that," Walter said. "But we're only talking about keeping your Bobby indoors. Unless you're on speaking terms with Bobby, I don't see how you know he minds being kept indoors."

"My cat is an animal. The beasts of the earth weren't given the gift of language. Only people were. It's one of the ways we know we were created in God's image."

"Right, so my point is, how do you know he likes to run free?"

"Cats love being outdoors. Everybody loves being outdoors. When the weather warms up, Bobby stands by the door, wanting to go out. I don't have to talk to him to understand that."

"But if Bobby's just an animal, that is, not a human being, then why does his mild preference for being outdoors trump the right of songbirds to raise their families?"

"Because Bobby is part of our family. My children love him, and we want the best for him. If we had a pet bird, we'd want the best for it, too. But we don't have a bird, we have a cat."

"Well, thank you for listening to me," Walter said. "I hope you'll give it some thought and maybe reconsider."

Linda was very offended by this conversation. Walter wasn't really even a neighbor, he didn't belong to the homeowners association, and the fact that he drove a Japanese hybrid, to which he'd recently applied an OBAMA bumper sticker, pointed, in her mind, toward godlessness and a callousness regarding the plight of hardworking families, like hers, who were struggling to make ends meet and raise their children to be good, loving citizens in a dangerous world. Linda wasn't greatly popular on Canterbridge Court, but she was feared as the person who would knock on your door if you'd left your boat parked in your driveway overnight, in violation of the homeowners covenant, or if one of her children had seen one of your children lighting up a cigarette behind the middle school, or if she'd discovered a minor defect in the construction of her house and wanted

to know if your house had the same minor defect. After Walter's visit with her, he became, in her incessant telling, the animal nut who'd asked her if she was on speaking terms with her cat.

Across the lake, on a couple of weekends that summer, the people of Canterbridge Estates noticed visitors on Walter's property, a handsome young couple who drove a new black Volvo. The young man was blond and body-built, his wife or girlfriend svelte in a childless big-city way. Linda Hoffbauer declared the couple "arrogant-looking," but most of the community was relieved to see these respectable visitors, since Walter had previously seemed, for all his politeness, like a potentially deviant hermit. Some of the older Canterbridgeans who took long morning constitutionals were now emboldened to chat up Walter when they met him on the road. They learned that the young couple were his son and daughter-in-law, who had some sort of thriving business in St. Paul, and that he also had an unmarried daughter in New York City. They asked him leading questions about his own marital status, hoping to elicit whether he was divorced or merely widowed, and when he proved adept at dodging these questions, one of the more technologically savvy of them went online and discovered that Linda Hoffbauer had been right, after all, to suspect Walter of being a nutcase and a menace. He'd apparently founded a radical environmental group that had shut down after the death of its co-founder, a strangely named young woman who clearly hadn't been the mother of his children. Once this interesting news had percolated through the neighborhood, the early-morning walkers left Walter alone again – less, perhaps, because they were disturbed by his extremism than because his hermitlike existence now strongly smacked of grief, the terrible sort of grief that it's safest to steer clear of; the enduring sort of grief that, like all forms of madness, feels threatening, possibly even contagious.

Late in the following winter, when the snow was beginning to melt, Walter showed up again on Canterbridge Court, this time carrying a carton of brightly colored neoprene cat bibs. He claimed that a cat wearing one of these bibs could do any frolicsome outdoor thing it pleased, from climbing trees to batting at moths, except pounce effectively on birds. He said that putting a bell on a cat's collar had been proven to be useless in warning birds. He added that the low-end estimate of songbirds daily murdered by cats in the United States was one million, i.e., 365,000,000 per year (and this, he stressed, was a conservative estimate and did not include the starvation of the murdered birds' chicks). Although Walter seemed not to understand what a bother it would be to tie a bib around a cat every time it went outdoors, and how silly a cat would look in bright blue or red neoprene, the older cat owners on the street did politely accept the bibs and promise to try them, so that Walter would leave them alone and they could throw the bibs away. Only Linda Hoffbauer refused a bib altogether. Walter seemed to her like one of those big-government liberals who wanted to hand out condoms in the schools and take away people's guns and force every citizen to carry a national identity card. She was inspired to ask whether the birds on his property belonged to him,

and, if not, what business of his it was if her Bobby enjoyed hunting them. Walter replied with some bureaucratese about the North American Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which supposedly prohibited harming any non-game bird that crossed the Canadian or Mexican border. Linda was disagreeably reminded of the country's new president, who wanted to hand over national sovereignty to the United Nations, and she told Walter, as civilly as she could, that she was very busy raising her children and would appreciate it if he wouldn't knock on her door anymore.

From a diplomatic perspective, Walter had chosen a poor time to come around with his bibs. The country had stumbled into a deep economic recession, the stock market was in the toilet, and it seemed almost obscene of him to still be obsessed with songbirds. Even the retired couples on Canterbridge Court were hurting – the deflation of their investments had forced several of them to cancel their annual winter retreats to Florida or Arizona – and two of the younger families on the street, the Dents and the Dolbergs, had fallen behind on their mortgage payments (which had ballooned at exactly the wrong moment) and seemed likely to lose their homes. While Teagan Dolberg waited for replies from credit-consolidation companies that seemed to change their phone numbers and mailing addresses weekly, and from low-cost federal debt advisers that turned out to be neither federal nor low-cost, the outstanding balances on her Visa and MasterCard accounts were jumping up in monthly increments of three and four thousand dollars, and the friends and neighbors to whom she'd sold ten-packs of manicure sessions, at the manicure station she'd set up in her basement, continued to show up to have their nails done without bringing in any more income. Even Linda Hoffbauer, whose husband had secure road-maintenance contracts with Itasca County, had taken to lowering her thermostat and letting her children ride the school bus instead of delivering and fetching them in her Suburban. Anxieties hung like a cloud of no-see-ums on Canterbridge Court; they invaded every house via cable news and talk radio and the internet. There was plenty of tweeting on Twitter, but the chirping and fluttering world of nature, which Walter had invoked as if people were still supposed to care about it, was one anxiety too many.

Walter was next heard from in September, when he leafleted the neighborhood under cover of night. The Dent and Dolberg houses were standing empty now, their windows darkened like the call-holding lights of emergency-hotline callers who'd finally quietly hung up, but the remaining residents of Canterbridge Estates all awoke one morning to find on their doorsteps a politely worded "Dear Neighbors" letter, rehashing the anticat arguments that Walter had presented twice already, and four attached pages of photographs that were the opposite of polite. Walter had apparently spent the entire summer documenting bird deaths on his property. Each picture (there were more than forty of them) was labeled with a date and a species. The Canterbridge families who didn't own cats were offended to have been included in the leafleting, and the families who did own

them were offended by Walter's seeming certainty that every bird death on his property was the fault of their pets. Linda Hoffbauer was additionally incensed that a leaflet had been left where one of her children could easily have been exposed to traumatizing images of headless sparrows and bloody entrails. She called the county sheriff, with whom she and her husband were social, to see whether perhaps Walter was guilty of illegal harassment. The sheriff said that Walter wasn't, but he agreed to stop by his house and have a word of warning with him – a visit that yielded the unexpected news that Walter had a law degree and was versed not only in his First Amendment rights but also in the Canterbridge Estates homeowners covenant, which contained a clause requiring pets to be under the control of their owners at all times; the sheriff advised Linda to shred the leaflet and move on.

And then came white winter, and the neighborhood cats retreated indoors (where, as even Linda had to admit, they seemed perfectly content), and Linda's husband personally undertook to plow the county road in such a way that Walter had to shovel for an hour to clear the head of his driveway after every new snowfall. With the leaves down, the neighborhood had a clear view across the frozen lake at the little Berglund house, in whose windows no television was ever seen to flicker. It was hard to imagine what Walter might be doing over there, by himself, in the deep winter night, besides brooding with hostility and judgment. His house went dark for a week at Christmastime, which pointed toward a visit with his family in St. Paul, which was also hard to imagine – that such a crank was nonetheless loved by somebody. Linda, especially, was relieved when the holidays ended and the crank resumed his hermit life and she could return to a hatred unclouded by the thought that somebody cared about him. One night in February, her husband reported that Walter had filed a complaint with the county regarding the deliberate blockage of his driveway, and this was somehow very agreeable for her to hear. It was good to know he knew they hated him.

In the same perverse way, when the snow again melted and the woods again greened and Bobby was let outside again and promptly disappeared, Linda felt as if a deep itch were being scratched, the primal sort of itch that scratching only worsens. She knew immediately that Walter was responsible for Bobby's disappearance, and she felt intensely gratified that he'd risen to her hatred, had given it fresh cause and fresh nourishment: that he was willing to play the hatred game with her and be the local representative of everything wrong with her world. Even as she organized the search for her children's missing pet and broadcast their anguish to the neighborhood, she secretly savored their anguish and took pleasure in urging them to hate Walter for it. She'd liked Bobby well enough, but she knew it was a sin to falsely idolize a beast. The sin she hated was in her so-called neighbor. Once it became clear that Bobby was never coming back, she took her kids to the local animal shelter and let them pick out three new cats, which, as soon as they were home again, she freed from their cardboard boxes and shooed in the direction of Walter's woods.

Walter had never liked cats. They'd seemed to him the sociopaths of the pet world, a species domesticated as an evil necessary for the control of rodents and subsequently fetishized the way unhappy countries fetishize their militaries, saluting the uniforms of killers as cat owners stroke their animals' lovely fur and forgive their claws and fangs. He'd never seen anything in a cat's face but simpering incuriosity and self-interest; you only had to tease one with a mouse-toy to see where its true heart lay. Until he came to live in his mother's house, however, he'd had many worse evils to contend against. Only now, when he was responsible for the feral cat populations wreaking havoc on the properties he managed for the Nature Conservancy, and when the injury that Canterbridge Estates had inflicted on his lake was compounded by the insult of its residents' free-roaming pets, did his old anti-feline prejudice swell into the kind of bludgeoning daily misery and grievance that depressive male Berglunds evidently needed to lend meaning and substance to their lives. The grievance that had served him for the previous two years – the misery of chain saws and earthmovers and small-scale blasting and erosion, of hammers and tile cutters and boom-boxed classic rock – was over now, and he needed something new.

Some cats are lazy or inept as killers, but the white-footed black Bobby wasn't one of them. Bobby was shrewd enough to retreat to the Hoffbauer house at dusk, when raccoons and coyotes became a danger, but every morning in the snowless months he could be seen sallying freshly forth along the lake's denuded southern shore and entering Walter's property to kill things. Sparrows, towhees, thrushes, yellowthroats, bluebirds, goldfinches, wrens. Bobby's tastes were catholic, his attention span limitless. He never tired of killing, and he had the additional character flaw of disloyalty or ingratitude, rarely bothering to carry his kills back to his owners. He captured and toyed and butchered, and then sometimes he snacked a little, but usually he just abandoned the carcass. The open grassy woods below Walter's house and the surrounding edge habitat were particularly attractive to birds and Bobby. Walter kept a little pile of stones to throw at him, and he'd once scored a direct aqueous hit with the pressure nozzle on his garden hose, but Bobby had soon learned to stay in the woods in the early morning, waiting for Walter to leave for work. Some of the Conservancy holdings that Walter managed were far enough away that he was often gone for several nights, and almost invariably, when he returned home, he found fresh carnage on the slope behind his house. If it had only been happening in this one place, he might have stood it, but knowing that it was happening everywhere deranged him.

And yet he was too softhearted and law-abiding to kill somebody's pet. He thought of bringing in his brother Mitch to do the job, but Mitch's existing criminal record argued against taking this chance, and Walter could see that Linda Hoffbauer would probably just get another cat. Only after a second summer of diplomacy and educational efforts had failed, and after Linda Hoffbauer's husband had blocked his driveway with snow one too many times, did he decide that, although Bobby was just one cat among seventy-five million in America, the time

had come for Bobby to pay personally for his sociopathy. Walter obtained a trap and detailed instructions from one of the contractors fighting the nearly hopeless war on ferals on Conservancy lands, and before dawn one morning in May he placed the trap, baited with chicken livers and bacon, along the path that Bobby was wont to tread onto his property. He knew that, with a smart cat, you only got one chance with a trap. Sweet to his ears were the feline cries coming up the hill two hours later. He hustled the jerking, shit-smelling trap up to his Prius and locked it in the trunk. That Linda Hoffbauer had never put a collar on Bobby – too restrictive of her cat's precious freedom, presumably – made it all the easier for Walter, after a three-hour drive, to deposit the animal at a Minneapolis shelter that would either kill it or fob it off on an urban family who would keep it indoors.

He wasn't prepared for the depression that beset him on his drive out of Minneapolis. The sense of loss and waste and sorrow: the feeling that he and Bobby had in some way been married to each other, and that even a horrible marriage was less lonely than no marriage at all. Against his will, he pictured the sour cage in which Bobby would now be dwelling. He knew better than to imagine that Bobby was missing the Hoffbauers personally – cats were all about using people – but there was something pitiable about his trappedness nonetheless.

2.15. Pat Barker. *Toby's Room* (2012)

Pat Barker was born in 1943 in Thornaby-on-Tees in Yorkshire, England. She received her education at the London School of Economics and then she took up History at Durham University. Later Barker worked as a teacher of History and Politics. Her writing career started quite early, in her mid-twenties, encouraged by the famous British novelist Angela Carter.

Barker's first novels – *Union Street* (1982), *Blow Your House Down* (1984), *The Century's Daughter* (1986) – are sometimes characterized by critics as feminist, because their problematics are entwined with the lives of working-class women in the north of England. What made the writer world-famous, however, was her trilogy about the First World War (*Regeneration*, 1991, *The Eye in the Door*, 1993, and *The Ghost Road*, 1995). It is well known that her interest was spurred by her grandfather who fought in that war in the trenches in France. *Regeneration* was made into a film in 1997. *Another World* (1998) is also connected with the WW I theme through the memories of an old man.

Barker is a versatile author, and once having studied the psychoanalytic therapy which she describes in her famous trilogy, she took the subject further into *Crossing* (2001) where she describes a child psychologist and a young man convicted of murder 13 years earlier. *Double Vision* (2003) switches attention

to war again, but this time a war correspondent is haunted by experience in Afghanistan and the Balkans. The First World War springs up again in *Life Class* (2007) and *Toby's Room* (2012).

Noonday (2015) revisits the lives of the characters that readers know from *Toby's Room*; however, they are now living through the Second World War. And *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) takes one of the most famous conflicts in literature – the legendary Trojan War – to reflect on the war as a phenomenon in general, to get across a women's view of the war, to rip off all the romantic and glamorous aura of it.

Barker's awards that deserve mentioning are the 1993 Guardian Fiction Prize and Booker Prize for Fiction (1995).

Toby's Room is a novel about the relationship between war and art. The English painter and writer Windham Lewis (1882–1967) wrote in his famous autobiographical work "Blasting and Bombardiering" (1937): "With me war and art have been mixed up from the start. It is still. I wish I could get away from war. This book is perhaps an attempt to do so. Writing about war may be the best way to shake the accursed thing off by putting it in its place, as an unseemly joke" [25, p. 4]. Barker does something similar in her novel.

The novel traces the events of the years 1912 through 1917 and depicts the lives of several painters who also fought in World War I. The main character is Elinor Brooke who was a student at Slade, an art school in London. She and her brother Toby are very close, even to the point of unpermitted intimacy and embarrassment.

During the war, Toby, a medical officer, is reported "missing, believed killed". However, the mystery of his death is gradually discovered to reveal something that the British society held as shameful, forbidden and made it stigmatized.

The major theme of the novel is still kept in the focus: it is the issue of representing war in art. Kit Neville and Paul Tarrant, the former Slade students and war veterans, suffer horrible disfiguring wounds as well as traumatic memories of the war. There is also ekphrastic representation of the paintings these artists create to picture the war.

Discussion

1. How does the writer intertwine the events before, during and after the war? Which of these events are the main ones?
2. In what way does Barker raise the problem of art in relation to depicting war? Which dilemma is presented to the reader? What point of view do you support and why?
3. Describe these characters; which of them have real-life prototypes?
   - Elinor Brooke

- Paul Tarrant
- Kit Neville
- Henry Tonks
- Toby Brooke
- Harold Gillies

4. Why does the author raise such "unpoetic" and difficult issues as body mutilation and face surgery? In what way does it bring home to us the ontological value of the human body?
5. What are the book's allusions: to arts, to famous writers and works, to medicine?
6. Comment on this quotation: "… Writers of fiction and artists have seemed more effective in capturing the randomness and chaos of war than historians, social scientists, and military memoirists" (historian Roger Beaumont).
7. To which genre would you refer this novel and why?

The excerpts below explore the depths of trauma. Comment on the emotional effect and the underlying idea.

a) …He found himself looking at a series of winter landscapes, empty of people… every painting contained the shadowy figure of a man, always on the edge of the composition, facing away from the centre, as if he might be about to step outside the frame. Many of these figures were so lightly delineated they might have been no more than an accidental confluence of light and shade… At one level these were firmly traditional landscape paintings, but there was something unsettling about them. Uncanny. Oddly enough, he recognized the feeling. It was the paradox of the front line: an apparently empty landscape that is usually full of men. How on earth had she managed to get that? …

First, they appear as a hoard to Elinor who is visiting the hospital: Faces loomed up in front of her, all kinds of faces; the bodies in their garish uniforms hardly registered. Men with no eyes were being led along by men with no mouths; there was even one man with no jaw, his whole face shelving steeply away into his neck. Men, like Kit, with no noses and horribly twisted faces. And others – the ones she couldn't understand at all – with pink tubes sprouting out of their wounds and terrible cringing eyes looking out over the top of it all. Breughel; and worse than Breughel, because they were real …

…a whole wall full of portraits of men with hideously disfigured faces. … Individually, each portrait would have been remarkable; displayed together like this, row upon row, they were overwhelming. … Were they portraits, or were they medical illustrations? Portraits celebrate the identity of the sitter. Everything – the clothes they've chosen to wear, the background, the objects on a table by the chair –

leads the eye back to the face. And the face is the person. Here, in these portraits, the wound was central. She found her gaze shifting continuously between torn flesh and splintered bone and the eyes of the man who had to suffer it. There was no point of rest; no pleasure in the exploration of a unique individual. Instead you were left with a question: How can any human being endure this? ….

b) Three years and many lifetimes later, Paul watched the trap carrying two raw, hopeful young men reach the crest of the hill and dip into the hollow beyond it, and then, forcing his stiffening leg to move, he turned and limped after it.

It had become a preoccupation of his – almost an obsession – working out how the war had changed him; other people too, of course. He never managed to talk openly about it, not even to men he'd served with, perhaps because, for him, the changes had been mainly sexual. The young man in the trap had been a romantic: deferential, almost timid, in his approach to women. Three years later, he'd become coarser, less scrupulous, his behaviour verged, at times, on the predatory. For two years, his relationship with Elinor had protected him, but then her letters had become shorter, colder, until eventually she'd stopped writing altogether; after that, he'd regarded himself as free to take what he wanted.

Ahead of him, the farmhouse appeared and disappeared behind waves of rain, like an outcrop of rocks at low tide. The last hundred yards was up a steep hill. When, at last, he reached the gate he paused, not wanting to arrive breathless and in pain from the cramping of his leg. It was a full five minutes before he was ready to go on, and then he was aware, as he trudged up the drive, of a face looking down at him from an upstairs window. Elinor. A girl's face at an upstairs window, framed by ivy leaves. It seemed like the beginning of a story, though after her silence of the last few months their story must surely be drawing to a close. One visit to the hospital. One. People he hardly knew had visited more often than that. And then, during his stay in a convalescent home in Dorset, when he'd been bored almost to distraction: no letters, no card, nothing. Right, he'd thought. That was that. Over.

And then, out of the blue, this invitation to spend a weekend at the farmhouse. Not with her parents either; the note had made it clear they'd be alone. But no warmth in the note, no expression of love or longing, no hint that she continued to feel for him what he still felt for her. He'd found the tone chilling – and yet it hadn't occurred to him not to accept.

Outside the door, he paused again. He was just raising his hand to knock when the door opened and there stood a tall, thin girl dressed in black. It took him a second to recognize her. 'Elinor.'

'Paul.'

A moment's uncertainty, then she raised her face for him to kiss. Her lips were as dry and cracked as baked mud and she pulled away from him immediately.

'You sound surprised,' he said. 'I haven't got the day wrong, have I?'

'No, of course not, come in.'

The porch was exactly as he remembered it: a jumble of muddy boots, umbrellas, mackintoshes. A powerful smell of wet dog hung over everything, though it was a while before a springer spaniel appeared, his claws clicking on the stone flags: old, milky-eyed, but still going through the motions of defending his mistress and his home.

Paul knelt down and rubbed behind the dog's ears, producing grunts of contentment. 'Hello, boy.'

'Oh, he'll take any amount of that.'

'I don't remember him.'

'He'd have been in the kitchen; he used to live there more or less. Nowadays, he's got the run of the house.' She led the way into the hall. 'I expect you'd like to freshen up before tea?'

He followed her upstairs, watching the sway of her hips under the narrow skirt, hearing the whisper of silk as her thighs brushed together. Suddenly, he was aroused, impatient to hold her. He'd have liked to reach out now, but knew he had to be careful. She seemed so … friable, as if one rough movement might break her.

He'd never seen her like this before.

'I've put you in Toby's room.'

She opened the door and stood aside to let him pass. He swung his kitbag on to the nearest chair. When he looked round she was standing by the bed, stroking the jade-green counterpane. He heard the click of silk threads as they snagged on the palms of her hands.

'I'm afraid I'm not very well organized these days.' She didn't meet his eyes, wouldn't look at him, kept chafing her arms as if she were cold. 'I paint till my head spins and then there's no time left for anything else.' An attempt at a smile. 'Anyway. Come down when you're ready.'

He moved towards her, but she slipped past him.

'I'll be in the kitchen. Give me a shout if there's anything you want.'

I want you.

She'd gone. He heard her footsteps running downstairs.

Left alone, he poured tepid water into a bowl and splashed his face and as much of his neck and chest as he could easily reach. Still dripping, he went to stand in front of the mirror. The face looking back at him had a pink, excited, slightly furtive look. Behind his reflection, he could see one side of the double bed; he didn't intend to sleep in it alone. The house creaked and sighed all around him. How long had she been living here by herself? Painting, she said, till her head spun, and obviously neglecting herself: she was stick thin. The house, too, seemed bereft. He'd glimpsed dust sheets shrouding the furniture in some of the downstairs rooms. She was not so much living here as camping out, and he felt a stab of pity for her, mingled with curiosity. What on earth possessed her, to shut herself away like this?

Of course, her brother's death must have been devastating, but for a few weeks after it, she'd been seen frequently in town. But then – and nobody seemed to know why – her trips to London had ceased, and she'd walled herself up here, alone.

Well, no doubt she'd tell him, sooner or later. He dried his hands and face and went downstairs.

She was making a cup of tea. 'I've forgotten if you take sugar.'

'Two, please.'

It mattered, that she'd forgotten. When they first became lovers 'sugar' had been their private word for sex. One weekend they'd stayed in a boarding house on the coast – Eastbourne, was it? No, Brighton. Elinor was wearing a wedding ring he'd bought in Woolworth's. Over tea, sitting in a prim, chintzy lounge on a fat, overstuffed sofa, she'd leaned towards him and said, in a stagey whisper, 'Darling, I can't remember, do you take sugar in your tea?'

They'd collapsed in giggles while, at the next table, a middle-aged couple, puzzled and slightly scandalized, had pretended not to listen.

He sat at the kitchen table, his bad leg stretched out in front of him, and watched her pour boiling water into the teapot.

'How is it? Your leg.'

'Still attached. I'm one of the lucky ones.'

'Do you feel lucky?'

'We-ell. No; yes, I do really.'

'I'll let you put the milk in, you know how you like it.'

'Do you remember the night I proposed to you, I couldn't kneel down?'

'I don't recall you trying very hard.'

'Oh, I'm sure I did, I was very romantic. Then.'

'Well, go on, what about it?'

'It's the same knee.'

'That's it, is it? I was expecting another proposal, at least.'

'It's interesting, that's all. Wounded twice in exactly the same place.'

'What do you think God's trying to tell you, Paul? Leave the Church of England? Become a Methodist? They don't kneel.'

She came and sat opposite him. With her thin arms crossed over her chest, she seemed wary, almost nervous. There was something dried up about her, old-maidish, even. A flare of hope he'd experienced upstairs, when he watched her stroke the counterpane, faded. He thought, sadly, of the house in Ypres where the brass bedstead had seemed to grow till it filled the whole room. And that night, the first night they'd ever spent together, that bed had been the whole world.

'I kept expecting to see you in London,' he said.

'I don't get up to town much these days.'

He glanced round the room. It was a farmhouse kitchen, designed to be lived in rather than set apart for cooking. A fire burnt in the small grate; there was a scent of pine cones. On a table by the door, a vase of dried hogweed cast dramatic shadows across the whitewashed wall.

'It's nice here, but doesn't it get a bit lonely?'

'Not really. And I certainly don't miss London. You get so much more work done down here.'

'So you are managing to work?'

'Non-stop. How about you?'

He hesitated. 'I've been commissioned as a war artist.'

'Yes, I heard.'

He waited for her to congratulate him.

'Pay's good. Five pounds a week.'

'That is good. Have you started anything yet?'

'I've done a couple of landscapes. Well, you know me, what else would I paint?'

'Corpses?'

'Not allowed.'

'Ah.'

'You don't approve.'

'It's got nothing to do with me.'

The conversation was sticky, punctuated by long silences, though not from any lack of things to say. They were tiptoeing round each other, each aware of the possibility of a sudden flare-up. If nothing else was left of their long, fractious love affair, a willingness to speak hurtful truths, and a fear of hearing them, remained.

'I'm actually working at the Slade,' Paul said. 'I bumped into Tonks and he said I could have a room.'

'Doesn't five pounds a week run to a studio?'

'Yes, but I need a lot of space. Some of the paintings are going to be quite big.'

'How big?'

He spread his arms wide.

'Hmm. Mind you don't fall off the scaffold.'

He laughed, but he was nettled by her sarcasm. This was exactly the kind of prickly, competitive exchange he was used to having with Kit Neville, and one or two other of his male contemporaries. But then, Elinor had always been more like a brilliant, egotistical boy than a girl. He remembered a fancy-dress party at the Slade – the end of his first term – coming into the hall and seeing a figure dressed as Harlequin, wearing a mask. He hadn't known, at first glance, whether it was a man or a woman. Later, when he danced with her, her body against his had felt slim and muscular, but very far from masculine. The mask, the anonymity, had excited him, especially when he realized there was a second Harlequin figure, also female. He didn't know, to this day, which girl he'd danced with first.

With an effort, he dragged himself back to the present. He'd feel more bones than curves if he danced with her now.

'I was so sorry to hear about Toby.'

He'd already offered his condolences twice, once by letter and once, in person, at the hospital, but he felt it needed to be said again. She nodded; her eyes were bright though he suspected she was past crying. He wondered if she'd ever really cried at all.

'You know, at first I thought "Missing, Believed Killed" meant there was a tiny bit of hope, but Father says they don't say that unless they're sure. It just means there's nothing left, nothing identifiable.'

She was looking at him, perhaps even now cherishing a small, flickering hope that he might say something different.

'Your father's right, I'm afraid.'

'But surely they'd find the identity disc?'

'Not necessarily, not if it was a direct hit.' He groped for something to soften the brutal reality. 'It would be very quick, no pain, he wouldn't even have known.'

God, the platitude count was mounting. He hated visiting bereaved relatives; you always ended up saying something utterly banal. Or, worse still, telling lies.

'Did you know Kit was one of Toby's stretcher-bearers?'

'No, I didn't,' he said. 'Actually, I haven't heard from Kit for quite a while.'

'Nor me.' She took a deep, unsteady breath. 'After Toby – after we got the telegram – I wrote to Kit to ask him if he knew anything, but I didn't get a reply. I thought it was a bit odd, really. I mean, you'd expect a letter of condolence, wouldn't you? I mean, he knew Toby, they served together. Only for two or three months, but … Well, I suppose that's not very long.'

'Out there it is.'

'But no, nothing. Not a word. I thought, he can't have got the letter, so I wrote again.' She shrugged. 'Still nothing.'

'Perhaps he just didn't know what to say.'

A weak explanation, and not one he accepted for a moment. It was extraordinary that Neville hadn't written. Why hadn't he? Because he knew how Toby had died and for some reason couldn't bring himself to trot out the usual consoling platitudes? But that didn't excuse ignoring her letters. In fact, Paul couldn't think of a single acceptable excuse.

'You must have heard from Toby's CO?'

'A couple of sentences. Quite … I don't know. Grudging.'

'You could always try the Padre.'

'Oh, he wrote too, same sort of thing. "Very gallant officer" – so on and so forth. I could've told them that.'

'They mightn't know anything.'

'No, I suppose not.' She wiped her hand across her eyes. 'Do you think it's too early for a glass of wine?'

'I think it's a marvellous idea.'

She fetched a bottle from the dresser. 'Here, you open it. I get into a muddle with that corkscrew.'

He drew the cork, poured wine into two glasses and handed one to her. 'Well,' he said, at a loss for words. 'Absent friends.'

They moved closer to the fire. He was glad not to have the expanse of the table between them, though she chose an armchair and left him to occupy the sofa alone. For a moment the only sound was the crackle and hiss of flames.

'You know, you said once if Toby died you'd come back here and paint the countryside he grew up in. You said you'd want to paint what made him, not what destroyed him.'

She smiled. 'That's exactly what I've done.'

'Does it help?'

'No, nothing helps.'

He waited, but she was not to be trapped into a line of conversation that might end in tears.

'Come on, I'll show you.'

They walked across the yard where a few white hens pecked in a desultory way at the dust. A cockerel stalked towards them, shaking his blood-red comb, the last rays of the setting sun waking an emerald gleam in his black neck feathers.

'I work in the barn now. I find it helps to leave the house in the morning, you know? To actually go to work.'

'I'm just the same, I thought at first I'd hate getting up in the mornings and going to the Slade, but actually I prefer it.'

The barn was dark at first, so dark he almost stumbled, but there was a door immediately ahead. Once that was open, he saw that the interior was flooded with light: oblique, amber light at this hour of the afternoon, but the windows faced north. The morning light must be wonderful.

Facing the door was an easel, partially draped in a paint-daubed white cloth. Instinctively, he looked away; work in progress was always private. The completed canvases were stacked against a wall.

She waved him over to them. 'Go on, have a look.'

He took his time. To be brutally honest, he'd expected nostalgia: scenes from rural life, happy children, impossibly long, golden summer days. Instead, he found himself looking at a series of winter landscapes, empty of people. Well, that was his first impression. When he looked more closely, he realized that every painting contained the shadowy figure of a man, always on the edge of the composition, facing away from the centre, as if he might be about to step outside the frame. Many of these figures were so lightly delineated they might have been no more than an accidental confluence of light and shade. He stood back, trying to pin down his response. At one level these were firmly traditional landscape paintings, but there was something unsettling about them. Uncanny. Oddly enough, he recognized the feeling. It was the paradox of the front line: an apparently empty landscape that is actually full of men. How on earth had she managed to get that?

'They're very good,' he said, at last.

'It's not about that.'

'No.'

He held up a canvas, one of the few she'd had framed. It showed the hill behind the house; under the trees, at the edge of the painting, was a patch of deeper shadow that might, or might not, be the head and shoulders of a man. Paul intended to say how much he admired it. Instead, he said, 'He looks as if he's trying to get out.'

Her eyes flared. 'It's interesting you should say that. I had a lot of trouble with that one. I thought I'd got it and … and then when I came down the next morning the figure had moved.' She caught his expression. 'Of course, I don't mean actually moved. I must have remembered it wrong.'

'He's in every painting. Toby.'

'A male figure.' She couldn't meet his eyes. 'Oh, all right, Toby. But I'm not running away from it, you know. It's not like you and your corpseless war.'

'Don't let's argue. They are very, very good.' Clearly, Toby had become her muse. Her talent flourished on his death, like Isabella's pot of basil growing out of a murdered man's brains. Elinor wasn't flourishing, though. When he turned to look at her, he noticed again the shadows under her eyes. 'You must be pleased.'

'Ye-es. Only I don't seem to know where I'm going any more.' She pointed to the easel. 'I've been trying to finish that for … Oh, I don't know, feels like for ever.'

'Perhaps you need a break. Why don't you come to London?'

'Yes, I will, I do need a break, but it can't be next weekend, I've got to go to my sister's. It would've been Toby's twenty-eighth on Saturday. I can't not be there for that.'

He took a last look round. The sunlight was almost gone and there was a distinct chill in the air.

'Come on,' she said, touching his arm. 'Let's go and eat.'

Dinner was rabbit stew with herbs and vegetables from the garden: better food than you'd easily find in London these days. At first they ate in silence. Fastidiously, he removed a slug from his cabbage and set it down carefully on the side of his plate.

'Protein,' she said, drily. 'Don't waste it.'

'I'll stick to the rabbit, if you don't mind.'

After they'd finished eating, they returned to sit by the fire. She was drinking quickly, always an encouraging sign, and as she drank some colour returned to her cheeks and her cheekbones looked a little less sharp, but she was much too thin. Her breasts hardly lifted the cotton blouse, though he caught the shadows of her nipples as she leaned forward to refill his glass.

'Do you know,' he said, 'I was trying to remember the first time I saw you.'

'It would've been in the Antiques Room, surely?'

'No, I mean, really saw you. Saw you, saw you. You were running down Gower Street with the girls –'

Her lips curved. 'Oh, the wild girls –'

'And you must've got a stone in your shoe or something because you suddenly stopped and took it off, and you had these black stockings on, and there was a great big hole in the heel and all this pink skin peeping out. I thought it was the most erotic thing I'd ever seen.'

She burst out laughing. 'Paul, that is pathetic.'

'No, it's not –'

'You were drawing naked women every day.'

'Nudity's not all that interesting. Your heel – that was the thing.'

Self-consciously, she tucked her feet under the chair. She sipped her wine, not looking at him, but she was aware of him now, and, more importantly, she was aware of herself, of her nipples rubbing against the rough cotton of her blouse, of the tops of her thighs pressed moistly together under the thick woollen skirt. Feeling his gaze on her, she put a hand up to the nape of her neck.

'You're growing it again.'

'Not really, I just can't be bothered to get it cut.'

He began deliberately to talk about the past. The weekend war broke out they'd all been together in this house: Elinor, Toby, Kit and himself. Blazing hot, he remembered it, and as the dusty, late-summer days passed, the news from London had become grimmer.

'I remember,' she said. 'I looked out of the window and you and Dad were on the terrace talking about it.'

'Oh, and Toby's friend was staying too – what was his name?'

'Andrew? He was killed in 1915. It changed Toby, there was always a kind of sadness about him after that.'

'They were revising, weren't they? And the rest of us all went off to see a church. The Doom. And on the way back Kit fell off his bike. Do you remember?'

'Yes – he asked me to marry him.'

'Then?'

'Lying on the ground like a wounded hero.'

'I didn't know that. The slithy tove.'

'Did you ever see him out there?'

'Once, in Ypres. That was back in – oh, I don't know. December, '14? He was incredibly drunk, and we spent the entire evening talking about you.'

'Hmm, did you? I'm glad I wasn't a fly on that wall.'

'All very flattering.' Though it hadn't been. Our Lady of Triangles, Neville had called her, and he certainly hadn't meant it as a compliment. Well, no triangles now: just a strange, solitary woman obsessively painting her dead brother. 'This is good,' he said, taking another sip of the wine.

She'd eaten well, and the food seemed to have lightened her mood. She sat more easily, smiled more naturally. He wasn't absolutely sure, but he thought she might have run a comb through her hair.

After coffee, they spent a few minutes walking in the garden. A full moon threw their linked shadows across the lawn, but the temperature was falling rapidly and he was glad when she suggested they should go back inside. In the doorway, he paused, looking at the room they were about to enter: shadows flickering on the walls, pools of golden light around the lamps, two wine glasses side by side on the table. Whatever else happened tonight, he would remember this.

And what was going to happen was agonizingly difficult to predict. They took their glasses through to the drawing room. She sat at the piano, he joined her there, their hips and thighs almost, but not quite, touching. He could hardly play at all and she was by no means the accomplished young lady her mother had no doubt wished to produce, but together they managed to cobble together a medley of music-hall favourites, improvised, talked, laughed, sang, drank, before finally sinking into two armchairs. Suddenly, neither of them could think of anything to say. In the silence, he heard the clock ticking towards midnight.

He reached out and took her hand, feeling her finger bones crunch as he tightened his grip. 'How long have you been here on your own?'

'I don't know, I've lost track. Mother's staying with Rachel.'

'How is she?'

'Not good. To begin with she just seemed … dazed. Lay on the sofa all day, didn't get dressed … They all thought I ought to stay and look after her, but …' She shook her head. 'We'd have killed each other in a week.'

That hardness in her. It was growing, he thought.

'Anyway, she's happier there. She's got the grandchildren. Children help because they don't understand, they live in the present. Animals too. He's been wonderful.' She nodded at Hobbes, who raised his head, then lowered it again with a groan, keeping his bloodshot eyes fixed on her. 'Never says the wrong thing because he never says anything.'

'Doesn't it help to talk?'

'Well, you know. You must've lost people …?'

'It's not the same out there.'

She was waiting for him to go on, and that was new. For the first time ever she'd asked him a question about the war.

'Chap out there – Barnes, he was called, Titus Barnes. God knows why his parents thought they had the right to inflict that on him. Anyway, he got hit in the head, one side blown off. It was a couple of days before we could get to see him. And of course we all sat round and listened to him snore, it was pretty grim, we knew he wouldn't live – the puzzle was why he was still alive – and we'd all liked him. But then we had to go, and by the time we'd gone a hundred yards we were laughing and joking as if nothing had happened.' He looked at her averted face. 'Sorry, I know it sounds harsh, but there's not a lot of point grieving when you know you're going to be next.'

He couldn't tell what she thought. She was looking down at the dregs of wine in her glass, swishing them from side to side. 'Can I get you another?'

She came to stand beside him while he poured. As he handed her the glass his hand touched hers and he felt her shiver. Gently, he ran his forefinger up her arm, tracking the groove between radius and ulna, pressing hard enough to produce a wave-like motion in her flesh. She didn't pull away. He took the glass from her, set it down on the table and, cradling her face between his hands, began to kiss her, gently at first, barely brushing his lips against hers, letting their breaths mingle, afraid that any sudden movement would send her scurrying away. But then, she began to kiss him back. Soon their arms were twined around each other and he could feel the edge of her ribcage pressing into his chest; he was more aware of that than of her breasts. Her dry skin rubbed against his, as thirsty as sand. His hands slid down to her hips, tilting her pelvis towards him, his mouth found the hollow at the base of her throat …

Instantly, she pushed him away. 'No.'

'Why not?'

'I can't. Don't ask me, I just can't.'

'All right.' He had to force the words out, producing in the process a hard, scratchy little laugh that shaded uncertainly into tenderness. 'But at least let's sit together, you seem terribly far away over there.'

She came and curled up beside him on the sofa. Perhaps that's what she wanted: a brother's love. The comfort of long familiarity, without any of the thrill and danger of sex. But no, there'd been real passion in that kiss, and it hadn't all come from him. She would let him make love to her, if not tonight, then tomorrow. They'd gone beyond the point where either of them wanted to turn back. But it would be completely wrong – and stupid – to go on pressing her now. So he was patient, stroking her arm, talking softly, pleased when he made her laugh.

When it was time for bed, they went upstairs together, passing the tall mirrors that faced each other across the half-landing. Briefly, they became a million couples, their linked reflections stretching away into an unimaginable distance. Even now, he was full of hope. But outside her bedroom door, she stopped and looked up at him, and her face in the lamplight was pinched and old.

'Well then, goodnight,' he said, deliberately flattening his voice on the final word to stop it becoming a question.

'I've been sleeping in Toby's room, I'm afraid I haven't even got round to changing the sheets.'

'We've slept in the same sheets before.'

He tried to prevent this remark sounding sharp, but he didn't succeed, and the slight pressure hardened her against him, as he'd known it would.

'Just go down and make yourself a cup of coffee in the morning,' she said. 'Though I'll probably be up.'

She slipped into her bedroom and the door clicked shut behind her. He rested his hand, briefly, on the cold wood, before walking the few yards further along the corridor to Toby's room.

It took him only a few minutes to unpack. Apart from his drawing pads, shaving kit and a change of underwear he'd brought next to nothing with him. Then, feeling too tense for sleep, he wandered round the room, looking at books and photographs.

It was very obviously a young man's room. If Elinor had been sleeping here, she'd left no trace of her presence. He wished he could remember Toby more clearly, but he'd only met him once, that last weekend before the war, and all his memories of that time were of Elinor and Neville. Elinor, awkward and rebellious in her mother's presence, quite unlike the startlingly self-possessed young woman he knew at the Slade. Neville, his usual bumptious self: almost, but never quite, ridiculous. Toby had just been a fair-haired young man in the background. Paul probably wouldn't have noticed him at all, if it hadn't been for his extraordinary resemblance to Elinor. Curiously, Toby had been beautiful, whereas Elinor, even at her best, just missed beauty, though Paul found her more attractive because she didn't have that final, daunting perfection.

Apart from that, the weekend was a jumble of random recollections: newspapers on the terrace, fields of corn bending in the wind, shadows of clouds fleeing across them, Neville's pink, excited face as he came into the drawing room after dinner to announce that Russia had mobilized. Paul hadn't known what to make of it all; he'd swung between bursts of wild excitement and complete indifference. Wars were fought by professional armies. Once the novelty wore off, he couldn't see this making much difference to his life.

The photographs were mainly of cricket and rugby teams. Nothing more recent than Toby's schooldays, not even a graduation photograph, though there was one on the piano downstairs. This was a room frozen in time, and not at the moment of Toby's death. No, long before that, possibly when he left home to live in London. You got the impression that on subsequent visits he'd brought very little of himself back.

But then, that was true of Paul as well. On his rare visits to see his father and stepmother in Middlesbrough he always felt as if he were impersonating the boy he'd once been. It was impossible to feel comfortable; even in his old bed, his shoulder blades refused to fit the hollows in the mattress left by a shorter version of himself.

A row of books lined the shelf above the mantelpiece. He ran his fingers along the spines, selecting a volume here and there for a closer look. Shakespeare's Sonnets, heavily underlined throughout, little self-conscious comments written in the margins. Obviously a school prize: the name and date written in a rounded, still unformed hand. Treasure Island. Another prize, but much earlier. On the flyleaf, Toby had written his name and address: 'Tobias Antony Brooke, Leybourne Farm, Netherton, Sussex, England, Great Britain, Europe, Northern Hemisphere, Earth, Solar System, Milky Way, the Universe.'

Paul was smiling as he closed the book. That little boy was suddenly a powerful presence in the room. He picked up a photograph, the only one, as far as he could see, of Toby as an individual rather than a member of a team. The image was overexposed, so one side of his face had faded into white. Looking at it, Paul could almost believe he heard a faint echo of the explosion that had blown this laughing boy into unidentifiable gobs of flesh. The poignancy of a young life cut short. He hadn't known Toby, but at this moment he could have cried for him: the small boy who'd located himself so precisely in the world, and now was nowhere.

Thoroughly unsettled, Paul got into bed and turned off the lamp. Lying on his back, listening to the night sounds that came through the open window, he closed his eyes and tried to sleep. The sheets smelled of Elinor's hair and skin. He wondered whether they'd been changed since Toby's last leave, but yes, surely they would've been: the shrine-keeping would have started with his death. The room was a shrine, but there was nothing unusual in that: thousands of women were tending shrines to dead young men. Many of them went to seances, and were battened on by people who claimed to be able to contact the dead. There were even some who produced photographs of the dead man's spirit hovering behind his loved ones. Well, Elinor didn't need that: she had her paintings. Was there even one in which Toby didn't appear? Tomorrow, he'd ask Elinor if he could look at them again.

If tomorrow ever came. He was afraid of nightmares. He'd worked out little rituals to fend them off, routines he went through every night at bedtime, but nothing worked for long. And tonight, made restless by desire and with far too much alcohol coursing through his veins, he knew he was in for a bad time.

An owl hooted. And again. And again. Perhaps there were two, calling to each other? Some dispute over territory that would not be resolved in blood. He lay, listening. An owl's cry is such a knowing sound. As he drifted off, he found himself wondering what it was that these owls knew. Their cries pursued him through the thickets of sleep. He was stumbling over tree roots in the depths of a winter forest, so still that a solitary leaf, falling, fractured the silence. But then, from somewhere up ahead, came the sound of a branch creaking. The noise fretted his sleep until, at last, he came awake with a cry, his heart thudding against his ribs. He'd heard something. Perhaps no more than a floorboard creaking, but somehow the sound had wound its way into his dream. Then he caught the soft slur of naked feet, and, clearly visible in the violent moonlight, the knob of the door began to turn.

Elinor slipped into the room, a slight figure in a white nightdress.

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.

'Can't you sleep?' he asked.

'It's the owls, I've never heard them like this before.'

Still half drowned in sleep, he shifted towards the wall and patted the counterpane, inviting her to sit down.

Instead, she slipped her nightdress off her shoulders and let it fall around her feet. His throat was too swollen to let him speak. Silently, he held the covers open and welcomed her into his arms.

2.16. Donna Tartt. *The Goldfinch* (2013)

Donna Tartt was born in 1963, Greenwood, Mississippi, USA. She comes from a middle-class family, but with the tradition of avid reading. In 1981, Tartt enrolled in the University of Mississippi, but when her professors discovered and encouraged her talent for writing, she transferred to Bennington College where she studied classics graduating with a BA.

Though Tartt is still the author of only three full-scale novels, her awards outnumber that figure, the major ones being the 2003 WH Smith Literary Award and the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She made it into the *Time* 100 Most Influential People (2014) and was nominated for other prestigious book awards.

The start of Tartt's literary career was very successful. When her first novel *The Secret History* (1992) was published, it immediately gained broad international renown; while the third one received the most important literary prize in the US.

Her three novels (*The Secret History*, 1992, *The Little Friend*, 2002, and *The Goldfinch*, 2013) are voluminous; each one took about 10 years to write. Tartt is a contemporary type of stylist who intricately combines genres and stylistic modes, makes bold experiments, but at the same time presents the reader with the meticulous realism of detail, both internal and external.

In the centre of the narration of *The Goldfinch* is a thirteen-year-old boy called Theo Decker. He happens to appear in the epicenter of a terrorist explosion in an art museum. A survivor of this tragedy, in which his mother dies, Theo learns about life's trials and human suffering on top of his own home and school turmoil. Theo goes through life learning its attractive and gruesome sides. Thus, the Barbour family who adopt him, because his own father abandons him, demonstrates the privileges of the social elite, while his new friend Boris Pavlikovsky, a Polish-Ukrainian, introduces him to drugs, sex and alcohol. He does not fully justify this relationship, as he is quite dexterous and devious. However, in the end he manages to make up for the trouble he caused Theo.

The psychic trauma haunts Theo wherever he finds himself – the writer arranges a captivating "tour" through America and Europe for Theo – and turns him into a spineless, easily impressionable and amenable young man, confused in his real feelings and totally lost in life.

The title of the novel coincides with that of a famous painting by the painter Fabritius, Rembrandt's disciple – "a small picture, the smallest in the exhibition, and the simplest: a yellow finch, against a plain, pale ground, chained to a perch by its twig of an ankle". This painting saved from the debris of the art museum after the terrorist bombing serves as a symbol of Theo's warm memories about his mother; it is also the source of huge fortune for Boris and a saving tool for Theo when he gets into a criminal mess.

Discussion

1. Describe Theo Decker's long way from his childhood, his fatal visit to the art museum, his final broodings over his mistakes, misfortunes and failures back in New York.
2. Which genres function within this novel? Among others, consider the genre characteristics of the novel of growing up.
3. Make up character profiles from numerous details and descriptions in the text for:
   - Theodore "Theo" Decker
   - Audrey Decker
   - Pippa
   - Boris Pavlikovsky
   - Andy Barbour
4. How well does the novel reflect modern-day America do you think?
5. Which scenes does the author "paint in black colours"? What produces this effect?
6. Give an overview of the social panorama D. Tartt depicts.
7. Comment on the most acute problems discussed in the book.

Read the excerpts and try to define the novel's subgenres. Give your reasons.

a) Boy with a Skull

THINGS WOULD HAVE TURNED out better if she had lived. As it was, she died when I was a kid; and though everything that's happened to me since then is thoroughly my own fault, still when I lost her I lost sight of any landmark that might have led me someplace happier, to some more populated or congenial life.

Her death the dividing mark: Before and After. And though it's a bleak thing to admit all these years later, still I've never met anyone who made me feel loved the way she did. Everything came alive in her company; she cast a charmed theatrical light about her so that to see anything through her eyes was to see it in brighter colors than ordinary—I remember a few weeks before she died, eating a late supper with her in an Italian restaurant down in the Village, and how she grasped my sleeve at the sudden, almost painful loveliness of a birthday cake with lit candles being carried in procession from the kitchen, faint circle of light wavering in across the dark ceiling and then the cake set down to blaze amidst the family, beatifying an old lady's face, smiles all round, waiters stepping away with their hands behind their backs – just an ordinary birthday dinner you might see anywhere in an inexpensive downtown restaurant, and I'm sure I wouldn't even

remember it had she not died so soon after, but I thought about it again and again after her death and indeed I'll probably think about it all my life: that candlelit circle, a tableau vivant of the daily, commonplace happiness that was lost when I lost her.

She was beautiful, too. That's almost secondary; but still, she was. When she came to New York fresh from Kansas, she worked part-time as a model though she was too uneasy in front of the camera to be very good at it; whatever she had, it didn't translate to film.

And yet she was wholly herself: a rarity. I cannot recall ever seeing another person who really resembled her. She had black hair, fair skin that freckled in summer, china-blue eyes with a lot of light in them; and in the slant of her cheekbones there was such an eccentric mixture of the tribal and the Celtic Twilight that sometimes people guessed she was Icelandic. In fact, she was half Irish, half Cherokee, from a town in Kansas near the Oklahoma border; and she liked to make me laugh by calling herself an Okie even though she was as glossy and nervy and stylish as a racehorse. That exotic character unfortunately comes out a little too stark and unforgiving in photographs – her freckles covered with makeup, her hair pulled back in a ponytail at the nape of her neck like some nobleman in The Tale of Genji – and what doesn't come across at all is her warmth, her merry, unpredictable quality, which is what I loved about her most. It's clear, from the stillness she emanates in pictures, how much she mistrusted the camera; she gives off a watchful, tigerish air of steeling herself against attack. But in life she wasn't like that. She moved with a thrilling quickness, gestures sudden and light, always perched on the edge of her chair like some long elegant marsh-bird about to startle and fly away. I loved the sandalwood perfume she wore, rough and unexpected, and I loved the rustle of her starched shirt when she swooped down to kiss me on the forehead. And her laugh was enough to make you want to kick over what you were doing and follow her down the street. Wherever she went, men looked at her out of the corner of their eyes, and sometimes they used to look at her in a way that bothered me a little.

Her death was my fault. Other people have always been a little too quick to assure me that it wasn't; and yes, only a kid, who could have known, terrible accident, rotten luck, could have happened to anyone, it's all perfectly true and I don't believe a word of it.

b) Morphine Lollipop

Auction houses all over the city called him, as well as private clients; he restored furniture for Sotheby's, for Christie's, for Tepper, for Doyle. After school, amidst the drowsy tick of the tall-case clocks, he taught me the pore and luster of different woods, their colors, the ripple and gloss of tiger maple and the frothed grain of burled walnut, their weights in my hand and even their different scents – "sometimes, when you're not sure what you have, it's easiest just to take a sniff" –

spicy mahogany, dusty-smelling oak, black cherry with its characteristic tang and the flowery, amber-resin smell of rosewood. Saws and counter-sinks, rasps and rifflers, bent blades and spoon blades, braces and mitre-blocks. I learned about veneers and gilding, what a mortise and tenon was, the difference between ebonized wood and true ebony, between Newport and Connecticut and Philadelphia crest rails, how the blocky design and close-cropped top of one Chippendale bureau rendered it inferior to another bracket-foot of the same vintage with its fluted quarter columns and what he liked to call the "exalted" proportions of the drawer ratio.

Downstairs – weak light, wood shavings on the floor – there was something of the feel of a stable, great beasts standing patiently in the dim. Hobie made me see the creaturely quality of good furniture, in how he talked of pieces as "he" and "she," in the muscular, almost animal quality that distinguished great pieces from their stiff, boxy, more mannered peers and in the affectionate way he ran his hand along the dark, glowing flanks of his sideboards and lowboys, like pets. He was a good teacher and very soon, by walking me through the process of examination and comparison, he'd taught me how to identify a reproduction: by wear that was too even (antiques were always worn asymmetrically); by edges that were machine-cut instead of hand-planed (a sensitive fingertip could feel a machine edge, even in poor light); but more than that by a flat, dead quality of wood, lacking a certain glow: the magic that came from centuries of being touched and used and passed through human hands. To contemplate the lives of these dignified old highboys and secretaries – lives longer and gentler than human life – sank me into calm like a stone in deep water, so that when it was time to go I walked out stunned and blinking into the blare of Sixth Avenue, hardly knowing where I was.

More than the workshop (or the "hospital," as Hobie called it) I enjoyed Hobie: his tired smile, his elegant big-man's slouch, his rolled sleeves and his easy, joking manner, his workman's habit of rubbing his forehead with the inside of his wrist, his patient good humor and his steady good sense. But though our talk was casual and sporadic there was never anything simple about it. Even a light "How are you" was a nuanced question, without it seeming to be; and my invariable answer ("Fine") he could read easily enough without my having to spell anything out. And though he seldom pried, or questioned, I felt he had a better sense of me than the various adults whose job it was to "get inside my head" as Enrique liked to put it.

But – more than anything – I liked him because he treated me as a companion and conversationalist in my own right. It didn't matter that sometimes he wanted to talk about his neighbor who had a knee replacement or a concert of early music he'd seen uptown. If I told him something funny that happened at school, he was an attentive and appreciative audience; unlike Mrs. Swanson (who froze and looked startled when I made a joke) or Dave (who chuckled, but awkwardly, and always a beat too late), he liked to laugh, and I loved it when he told me stories of his own life: raucous late-marrying uncles and busybody nuns of his childhood, the third-rate boarding school on the Canadian border where his

teachers had all been drunks, the big house upstate that his father kept so cold there was ice on the inside of the windows, gray December afternoons reading Tacitus or Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic. ("I loved history, always. The road not taken! My grandest boyhood ambition was to be a professor of history at Notre Dame. Although what I do now is just a different way of working with history, I suppose.") He told me about his blind-inone-eye canary rescued from a Woolworth's who woke him singing every morning of his boyhood; the bout of rheumatic fever that kept him in bed for six months; and the queer little antique neighborhood library with frescoed ceilings ("torn down now, alas") where he'd gone to get away from his house. About Mrs. De Peyster, the lonely old heiress he'd visited after school, a former Belle of Albany and local historian who clucked over Hobie and fed him Dundee cake ordered from England in tins, who was happy to stand for hours explaining to Hobie every single item in her china cabinet and who had owned, among other things, the mahogany sofa – rumored to have belonged to General Herkimer – that got him interested in furniture in the first place. ("Although I can't quite picture General Herkimer lounging on that decadent old Grecian-looking article.") About his mother, who had died shortly after his three-days-old sister, leaving Hobie an only child; and about the young Jesuit father, a football coach, who – telephoned by a panicky Irish housemaid when Hobie's father was beating Hobie "to flinders practically" with a belt – had dashed to the house, rolled up his sleeves, and punched Hobie's father to the ground. ("Father Keegan! He was the one who came to the house that time when I had rheumatic fever, to give me communion. I was his altar boy – he knew what the story was, he'd seen the stripes on my back. There've been so many priests lately naughty with the boys, but he was so good to me – I always wonder what happened to him, I've tried to find him and I can't. My father telephoned the archbishop and next thing you knew, done and dusted, they'd shipped him off to Uruguay.") It was all very different from the Barbours', where – despite the general atmosphere of kindness – I was either lost in the throng or else the uncomfortable subject of formal inquiry. I felt better knowing he was only a bus ride away, a straight shot down Fifth Avenue; and in the night when I woke up jarred and panicked, the explosion plunging through me all over again, sometimes I could lull myself back to sleep by thinking of his house, where without even realizing it you slipped away sometimes into 1850, a world of ticking clocks and creaking floorboards, copper pots and baskets of turnips and onions in the kitchen, candle flames leaning all to the left in the draft of an opened door and tall parlor windows billowing and swagged like ball gowns, cool quiet rooms where old things slept.

c) Everything of Possibility

AN EVERY-OTHER-DAY HABIT WAS still a habit, as Jerome had often reminded me, particularly when I didn't stick too faithfully to the every-other-day part. New York was full of all kinds of daily subway-and-crowd horror; the suddenness of the explosion had never left me, I was always looking for something

to happen, always expecting it just out of the corner of my eye, certain configurations of people in public places could trigger it, a wartime urgency, someone cutting in front of me the wrong way or walking too fast at a particular angle was enough to throw me into tachycardia and trip-hammer panic, the kind that made me stumble for the nearest park bench; and my dad's painkillers, which had started as relief for my nigh-on uncontrollable anxiety, provided such a rapturous escape that soon I'd started taking them as a treat: first an only-on-weekends treat, then an after-school treat, then the purring aetherous bliss that welcomed me whenever I was unhappy or bored (which was, unfortunately, quite a lot); at which time I made the earth-shaking discovery that the tiny pills I'd ignored because they were so insignificant and weak-looking were literally ten times as strong as the Vicodins and Percocets I'd been downing by the handful – Oxycontins, 80s, strong enough to kill someone without a tolerance, which person by that point was definitely not me; and when at last my endless-seeming trove of oral narcotics ran out, shortly before my eighteenth birthday, I'd been forced to start buying on the street. Even dealers were censorious of the sums I spent, thousands of dollars every few weeks; Jack (Jerome's predecessor) had scolded me about it repeatedly even as he sat in the filthy beanbag chair from which he conducted his business, counting my hundreds fresh from the teller's window. "Might as well light it on fire, brah." Heroin was cheaper – fifteen bucks a bag. Even if I didn't bang it – Jack, laboriously, had done the math for me on the inside of a Quarter Pounder wrapper – I would be looking at a much more reasonable expenditure, something in the neighborhood of four hundred and fifty dollars a month.

But heroin I only did on offer – a bump here, a bump there. As much as I loved it, and craved it constantly, I never bought it. There would never be a reason to stop. With pharmaceuticals on the other hand, the expense was a helpful factor since it not only kept my habit in control but provided an excellent reason for me to go downstairs and sell furniture every day. It was a myth you couldn't function on opiates: shooting up was one thing but for someone like me – jumping at pigeons beating from the sidewalk, afflicted with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder practically to the point of spasticity and cerebral palsy – pills were the key to being not only competent, but high-functioning. Booze made people sloppy and unfocused: all you had to do was look at Platt Barbour sitting around at J. G. Melon at three o'clock in the afternoon feeling sorry for himself. As for my dad: even after he'd sobered up he'd retained the faint clumsiness of a punch-drunk boxer, butterfingered with a phone or a kitchen timer, wet brain people called it, the mental damage from hard-core drinking, neurological stuff that never went away. He'd been seriously screwy in his reasoning, never able to hold down any kind of a long-term job. Me – well, maybe I didn't have a girlfriend or even any non-drug friends to speak of but I worked twelve hours a day, nothing stressed me out, I wore Thom Browne suits, socialized smilingly with people I couldn't stand, swam twice a week and played tennis on occasion, stayed away from

sugar and processed foods. I was relaxed and personable, I was as thin as a rail, I did not indulge in self-pity or negative thinking of any kind, I was an excellent salesman – everyone said so – and business was so good that what I spent on drugs, I scarcely missed.

Not that I hadn't had a few lapses – unpredictable glides where things flashed out of control for a few eerie blinks like an ice-skid on a bridge and I saw just how badly things could go, how quick. It wasn't a matter of money – more a matter of escalating doses, forgetting I'd sold pieces or forgetting to send bills, Hobie looking at me funny when I'd overdone things and come downstairs a bit too glassy and out-of-it. Dinner parties, clients…sorry, were you talking to me, did you just say something? no, just a little tired, coming down with something, maybe I'll go to bed a little early, folks. I'd inherited my mother's light-colored eyes, which short of sunglasses at gallery openings made it pretty much impossible to hide pinned pupils – not that anybody in Hobie's crowd seemed to notice, except (sometimes) a few of the younger, more with-it gay guys – "You're a bad boy," the bodybuilder boyfriend of a client had whispered into my ear at a formal dinner, freaking me out thoroughly. And I dreaded going up to the Accounts department at one of the auction houses because one of the guys there – older, British, an addict himself – was always hitting on me. Of course it happened with women too: one of the girls I slept with – the fashion intern – I'd met in the small-dog run in Washington Square with Popchik, it being rapidly apparent to both of us after thirty seconds on the park bench that we shared the same condition. Whenever things started getting out of hand I'd dialed it back and I'd even quit altogether a number of times – the longest, for a six-week stretch. Not everyone was able to do that, I told myself. It was simply a matter of discipline. But at this point, in the spring of my twenty-sixth year, I had not been more than three days clean in a row in over three years.

I'd worked out how to quit for good, if I wanted to: steep taper, seven day timetable, plenty of loperamide; magnesium supplements and free form amino acids to replenish my burnt-out neurotransmitters; protein powder, electrolyte powder, melatonin (and weed) for sleep as well as various herbal tinctures and potions my fashion intern swore by, licorice root and milk thistle, nettles and hops and black cumin seed oil, valerian root and skullcap extract. I had a shopping bag from the health food store with all the stuff I needed, which had been sitting on the floor at the back of my closet for a year and a half. All of it was mostly untouched except the weed, which was long gone. The problem (as I'd learned, repeatedly) was that thirty-six hours in, with your body in full revolt, and the remainder of your un-opiated life stretching out bleakly ahead of you like a prison corridor, you needed some fairly compelling reason to keep moving forward into darkness, rather than falling straight back into the gorgeous feather mattress you'd so foolishly abandoned.

That night when I got back from the Barbours' I swallowed a long-acting morphine tablet, as was my habit whenever I happened to come home in a remorseful mood and feeling I needed to straighten up: low dose, less than half of what I needed

to feel anything, just enough on top of the booze to keep me from being too agitated to sleep. The next morning, losing heart (for, usually, waking up sick at this phase of the kick plan, I very quickly lost my nerve), I crushed thirty and then sixty milligrams of Roxicodone on the marble top of the nightstand, inhaled it through a cut straw, then unwilling to flush the rest of the pills (well over two thousand dollars' worth) got up, dressed, flushed my nose with saline spray, and, after squirrelling away a few more of the long-acting morphs in case the "withdraws" as Jerome called them got too uncomfortable, slipped the Redbreast Flake tin in my pocket and – at six a.m., before Hobie awoke – took a cab up to the storage facility.

2.17. Helen Dunmore. *The Lie* (2014)

Helen Dunmore was born in Beverley, Yorkshire, England, in 1952. As a writer, she is rather underestimated as of the present moment. However, during her life she was a very prolific novelist, poet, writer of short stories and books for children. She graduated from the Nottingham High School for Girls and later attended the University of York. After graduating, she taught English in Finland, then taught literature and creative writing courses at the University of Glamorgan, the University of Bristol's Continuing Education Department and for the Open College of the Arts. She died of cancer in 2017.

Dunmore was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Some of her books for children are included in school curricula. Among Dunmore's most notable awards and honours are the 1996 Orange Prize, the 1990 Cardiff International Poetry Prize, and the Costa Book Awards Poetry and Book of the Year Awards for *Inside the Wave* (2017, posthumously). Dunmore was also longlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

Her poetry collections are numerous, as well as children's books.

Her most notable novels treat of subjects mostly related to the past wars – both in her own country and abroad. However, she managed to interweave other fascinating plot lines, individual stories, even those with a touch of the supernatural. Several of Dunmore's stories are set in Cornwall – a county in Great Britain that is referred to as a lieutenancy area .

Zennor in Darkness (1993) is a fictional account of D. H. Lawrence's life in Cornwall during the First World War. Besides the description of the soldiers and their families, it focuses on Lawrence's own dramatic episode – expulsion from this area on suspicion of espionage for Germans only because his wife was German.

A Spell of Winter (1995) describes a difficult family history where two abandoned siblings – a brother and a sister – grow up in their grandfather's house

under surveillance of a governess and a housemaid. Isolated from the outside world, they grow in their affection for each other, which becomes intimate and incestual. However, the tragic events spurred by the Great War change their lives.

Talking to the Dead (1996) is a haunting story of two sisters who bring the memory of the death of their little brother in childhood to their adult life.

The Siege (2001), shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award and the Orange Prize for Fiction, is set during the siege of Leningrad in 1941, while *The Betrayal* (2010), set in 1950s Leningrad, reveals the destinies of doctors and other citizens under Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union.

The Greatcoat (2012) is both a war novel and a ghost story set during and after World War II, in which the ghost of a perished officer visits a young newly married woman.

The Lie (2014) is one of the most excruciating stories that tells about the shell-shocked soldier who is haunted by the ghost of his childhood friend and war comrade who died in searing circumstances.

Dunmore's books are translated into more than 30 languages.

The novel *The Lie* is set in 1920 and speaks of the difficulties of the soldier's homecoming through the first-person perspective of the shell-shocked soldier Daniel who returns to the Cornish village in which he was brought up. The novel's interest in haunting links it to Pat Barker's *Another World*, which also draws on the genre of the ghost story, while its preoccupation with the effects of betrayal connect it to Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* (2012), which also centres on a promise broken.

The setting is Cornwall, from where thousands of young people went to the fronts of the First World War (more than 6,300 of the population of 350,000 were killed). A ghost pursues Daniel, who has returned to Cornwall from the war, after losing his best and only childhood friend Frederick on the battlefield. Daniel is an orphan from a very poor family, now he is deprived of his own home, which all these years has been occupied by another family. His return to a peaceful life is not at all as delightfully pastoral as the military posters had it. Having received a house and a piece of land from a lonely elderly woman, Daniel struggles to escape from his soul-tearing memories with the help of hard work, but the ghost of his friend Frederick and an inadvertent lie take him to another world from a cliff above the sea.

Discussion

1. Whose life story is in the focus of the novel? What sort of story is that?
2. Why does the author introduce the ghost story into the narration?

3. The novel's main characters are very different – in status, in psychological make-up, in relationship to the war. How do these differences contribute to the depiction of the tragic stance of the war? Consider these charactes:
   - Daniel
   - Frederick
   - Felicia
   - Mary Pascoe.
4. Explain how the quotation from Rudyard Kipling's collection of poetic epitaphs in the epigraph is related to the novel: "If any question why we died, // Tell them, because our fathers lied". Where else and why does the author use intertextual references (quotations)? What are their sources?
5. What role does the image of land play for understanding the novel's ideas? How does Dunmore describe the Cornish landscape?
6. How is the pre-war life and society different from the post-war existence in the village?
7. What issues of class and gender does H. Dunmore open up?
8. Which images in the novel can be regarded as symbols?
9. What are the different lies – and THE lie – that Daniel tells in the novel? What message is encoded through these lies?

Comment on the depth of human suffering as the passages below depict it:

a) Dead, disposal of: Bodies of dead men will be taken right away from the trenches to be buried.

It will frequently happen that substantial buildings are found close to the selected line of defence. The question then arises whether to occupy them or to demolish them.

I BURIED HER at the very edge of her land, at its highest point. I knew what she wanted, and there was no sense in waiting. If my mother had been alive, I would have gone to tell her, but I couldn't think of anyone else in the town who would want to come to Mary Pascoe's burial. Or would have any right to come. I dug down, always expecting to strike a shelf of granite, but the soil was deep enough. I dug her a decent grave, and lined it with dry brown bracken and branches of the rosemary bush that grew close to her door. I wrapped her in a piece of the army canvas that I hadn't needed for my shelter. The smell of her was bad when I lifted her, like a bird that you find crawling with lice and maggots after it has gone away to die in the foot of a hedge. But I didn't mind it. I had worked all day on her grave and I was sweating in spite of the cold. After the burial and the infilling of her grave, I stamped the earth down to settle it. I rolled a granite boulder to the head of the grave. I knew how quickly green would cover the turned earth.

The stream was running full after the heavy rains we'd had. I filled a bucket, took it to the outhouse where the goat was tethered, and stripped off my clothes. I thought that every pore of my body would be black with dirt, but my skin was white where my clothes had covered it. My hands and wrists, neck and face still held the tan of exposure. I washed myself with household soap, and when I was finished I sluiced the bucket over my head and over my entire body, until I was shaking with cold. I had one full change of clothes, and I put them on. That was when it came to me that I wouldn't sleep in my shelter that night. I would sleep in the cottage.

I told no one about Mary Pascoe's death. At first I didn't know who to tell. She never went near church or chapel. The people who used to visit her to buy vegetables, eggs or goat's milk had fallen away. My mother was her friend, perhaps, but I couldn't think of another. If I told the doctor, he'd say that I should have called him. He would have come, I'm sure, because he was known for treating those who couldn't afford to pay him, while he took his guineas from the big houses. There was nothing he could have done to help her. Mary didn't want him anyway. She wanted to die under her own hedge. She'd have feared the workhouse most, because it's said that if you die there, your body is taken for dissection. I don't think Dr Sanders would have sent her to the workhouse, but some busybody in the parish might have thought it a duty to have her conveyed to the infirmary.

After a few days it was too late to tell anyone. She had lived indoors for long enough that she wouldn't be missed. I couldn't remember the last time she had walked into town.

The cottage was my first task. I had to get the smell out of it. I opened the door wide, but the two windows that fronted the cottage had cracked or broken panes, and their wooden frames were rotten. I pulled out the rags with which Mary Pascoe had stuffed the broken panes, and examined the glass and wood carefully. I could bodge the sills. In time I could buy new panes of glass, and putty. For now I replaced the rags, and left the windows as they were.

The chimney wanted sweeping. I would do this first, so that the soot could fall and be cleaned away with the rest of the dirt. I had Mary Pascoe's broom, and an old ladder with rungs that didn't look rotten. The ground at the back of the cottage was higher than at the front. I scythed and trampled down the brambles that hooked from the hillside to the cottage wall, set down the ladder and tested it. I was well hidden. I grasped the side of the ladder with my right hand, and the broom in my left, and mounted the rungs to the top. First I cleared the guttering, which was packed with moss and rubbish. I needed to get higher, on to the roof itself. The slates had fallen away in parts and the roof had been patched with corrugated iron, rusted now. I would patch it further.

b) “The Ancient Mariner” is a strange choice of poem for children, you might think. We learned reams of it, the year I was ten, before I went to work, and it stayed in my head during the long days at Mulla House. There was Mr Roscorla, the gardener, and another boy, older than me, but we were always set to work apart so that we couldn’t waste time. I liked the work but it was lonely. All the hymns and poems I’d learned at school came alive inside my head. Even when I was in company, the rhythms wouldn’t leave me alone.

I would chant verses aloud to Frederick, as we sat propped against the harbour wall. It was his summer holiday. I worked Saturday mornings until one, but not the afternoons. He brought sandwiches, and so did I. His were beef, thickly sliced, black-edged and pink inside. It came from a sirloin joint, larded with its own fat. He would bring gingerbread in waxed paper, and cherries. I had bread and cheese and a slice of heavy cake. I don’t know which was the more delicious. I’d given my wages to my mother and she had given me back a penny. I was hard-working and learned quickly. Mr Roscorla, who was a fair man, let me plant a potato patch behind the greenhouses. I paid for seed potatoes against my wages, and took home eight stone of potatoes the first year.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

I made the hill and the lighthouse and the church into our own, inside my head, as I am sure we all did. The classroom hummed with our repetitions. In my mind the ship full of dead men sailed by the Garracks and Giant’s Cap, past the Island and into harbour. Every plot of land in the town and the country round about belonged to others, yet it was all mine, every roof and furze bush, every grain of sand. The sun soaked us through as we lay propped against the harbour wall, and we were utterly content.

I’d told Frederick that he must read The Ancient Mariner, and he’d found a Coleridge in the library of books that his father had bought, rows of them, all in the same livery. It lay on the sand beside us, and after we’d finished eating, he picked it up and began to read. He came to the lines I could hardly bear, even as badly as Frederick read them:

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread . . .

I reached over, snatched the book away from him and shut it up.

‘You don’t really believe there’s any such thing as a fiend?’ Frederick demanded, with the lazy scorn he was beginning to learn at his school. ‘It’s all superstition.’

'It's in the Bible,' I countered, though it wasn't the Bible that made me shudder. 'Besides, what do you know? I'd like to see you walk back alone from Mulla House across the moor on a winter evening, when the light's almost gone. You get lugged about everywhere by pony and trap, with a lantern.'

My words stung Frederick satisfactorily.

'I can beat you in a race any day, you ass!' he said, but it was feeble. I had won. He might bamboozle me with the rules of a queer game called Fives, but I was the hardened venturer, alone on the road in the dark. I couldn't get the words of the poem out of my head. After Frederick and I had parted that evening, they drummed in me all night, and for weeks afterwards. I didn't dare turn on the road, even when it was white with summer dust and the sun was high.

66 99 c) I think about the books. I wanted them from the moment I first saw them.

Yards and yards of books, in dark red livery, with gold names printed into the spines. Later, I understood that they were bound like that for the look of it, and that Mr Dennis had made a library by writing a cheque. There were all the novels of Charles Dickens, with dark and dazzling illustrations. There were Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, and The Woman in White. How I wished I could draw, like Walter Hartright, and become a great man. Someone had read The Woman in White before me, because there were marks on the pages. Most of the books had never been opened. There was poetry: Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Mrs Hemans, Adelaide Anne Procter. There were the Complete Works of Shakespeare in seven tall handsome volumes, and Palgrave's Golden Treasury. There was Lord Byron on a high shelf.

Those were the books that I read like a wolf. I took them out of the house one by one, under my jersey, and devoured them on the beaches, or propped against the rocks at Giant's Cap. I read at work, whenever I could. Anywhere that I wouldn't be observed. Even Frederick didn't know how many I took. Once, the book I was reading slipped over the edge of the rocky shelf where I perched, a hundred feet above the sea. It was Kidnapped, and I was David Balfour fleeing the Redcoats, lying up, watchful, hidden. The sun had made me sleepy. I must have nodded off without knowing it, and loosened my grip. The book went down, turning, and vanished into the sea. In my terror I almost threw myself after it. For weeks I waited in dread for Mr Dennis to notice its absence, and for roaring rage to descend on me, but no one said a word.

I would read the dialogues aloud, throwing words into the wind. They held patterns and rhythms I had never heard before. I learned so easily that I could read a poem once and have it lodged in my mind for whenever I wanted it. Mr Dennis was no longer the owner of his books: I was. I would bring out their contents as I weeded long rows of carrots and onions, or wheeled horse-muck to spread around the roses. I changed my speech to match the sentences I read, although even to myself it sounded strange. I hoarded new words and brought them out like coins.

c) The disease known as ‘trench feet’ is caused by prolonged standing in cold water or mud and by the continual wearing of wet socks, boots and puttees. It is brought on much more rapidly when the blood circulation is interfered with by the use of tight boots, tight puttees, or the wearing of anything calculated to cause constriction of the lower limbs. It can be prevented by:-

Improvements to trenches leading to dry standing and warmth.

Regimental arrangements ensuring that the men’s feet and legs are well rubbed with whale oil or anti-frostbite grease before entering the trenches, and that, so far as is possible, men reach the trenches with dry boots, socks, trousers, and puttees.

By taking every opportunity while in the trenches to have boots and socks taken off from time to time, the feet dried, well rubbed, and dry socks (of which each man should carry a pair) put on.

d) That night with Frederick, in the dark of the shell-hole, it was a bayonet I was afraid of, more than a grenade even. We’d failed. The raid was a disaster and those who could get away had gone. The rest were dead, or too injured to move, like Frederick. We were cornered if the Germans came and shone a light down. I had no idea where we were, although I could tell the direction of the line from the firing. We were in no-man’s-land, and no-man’s-land was as big as Africa once you were in it at night. There was water in the bottom of the shell-hole. Old rotten water, full of stinking things. There was a dugout in the side, where we were hidden. Wire ran from it up to the surface. They must have run a telephone wire out here, into no-man’s-land, so they could crouch in the dugout, listening, and send back messages. On the earthen shelf, someone had left a tin mug. I hoped there might be water in the mug, but it was empty. It made my skin crawl, to think of that German coming back for his mug. This was his hole, and we were in it.

The lower part of Frederick’s leg was bad. I lit a match from the box I carried in my tunic pocket, and cupped the flame to hide it. The calf of his boot was ripped open. Dirt had blown into the wound. There was shrapnel in it, and the flesh around was mushy. I saw a splinter big enough to grasp, but I didn’t dare draw it out. The match singed my hand, and I dropped it in the water below us. I knew enough. I unfixed the blade of my bayonet, and gripped the leather of his boot in my right hand so I could cut it with my left. The blade was too clumsy. I had my knife, and I tried with that, but he groaned and shook all over until I had to stop. I lit another match, shielding it carefully with my hands, even though we were right into the back of the dugout. I couldn’t get his boot off, because there was nothing above it I could safely get a hold of. There was a lot of bleeding, not pumping blood, just heavy, pulpy bleeding. I unwound the cotton tape from the top of my puttees, tied the pieces together and wrapped it around his thigh, tight enough to slow the blood. Frederick didn’t seem to know what had happened to him. He’d been hit on the head too, which might have been the reason. I felt his forehead and there was a bloody ridge. He wasn’t unconscious though. I could just

about see his eyes, and his pupils shrank from the light of the match. I was afraid that any moment he would start to feel his leg and make a noise so that they'd be bound to hear us. I wound off more of my puttees and made a gag ready.

The Germans must have been in this shell-hole all the time, listening to us, while we thought that they knew nothing of the raid. Once the shelling stopped, that would be the time for them to retake their dugout. I had my rifle. I fixed my bayonet again. But it was more than likely they'd lob grenades down before retaking it. That's what I'd have done. Our one chance was that they wouldn't know we were here. They'd think they were retaking an empty shell-hole, and that could wait, now that the raid was over. Besides, they wouldn't want to blow up a listening post that had already proved so useful.

e) To gain a decisive success the enemy must be driven out of his defences and his armies crushed in the open.

I KNEW HE would be at the foot of my bed tonight, and here he is. His head is bowed. His back is turned to me, and he's deep in thought, away by himself in that place where you can never reach even those you know best. That's how I realised what a soul was, when I was young. I'd sung about it in hymns, along with everyone else. I had a soul, I knew that, just as I knew I had a stomach. But it meant nothing until one day I saw my mother sitting in her chair by the unlit fire, her eyes open as if she was looking at the wall opposite. But she wasn't. If I'd made a sound she would have turned and become my mother again. I didn't make a sound. She was away, and I couldn't come to her. I saw something then: loneliness, like a frost that burns your hand when you touch it. I knew she was away, and I couldn't come near without breaking whatever it was that held her. When I first read 'My soul, there is a country/Far beyond the stars . . .' I knew what it meant. It was about how lonely we all were, trying to come close but something always stopping us, that something inside us that was as far away as the stars. From that time on, when I looked up at the night sky I couldn't feel that the stars were companions. I saw a forest of lights, going away into nowhere.

'Frederick,' I say, but he doesn't turn. The frost holds him. Tonight I'm less afraid of him than I've ever been, but farther from him too. He stands and dreams, lost in himself, and my voice doesn't touch him.

We are together in the shell-hole. He's propped against the back of the dugout. I've had to push and shove to get him safe, and I'm afraid I've hurt him, but this is the best place he can be. He doesn't cry out, but his breath whistles through his teeth. Even though there's no water in the dugout, it oozes damp, and stinks of raw earth and gas. I am wet and cold with sweat. The noise of shelling is not so loud now. It smells of blood down here too, like a butcher's shop. It takes a while before I understand where the smell is coming from. A rat scampers, close by, then goes still before I know where it is. It will have smelled the blood. I kick out, in case it's by my foot. Nothing happens.

I prop my rifle beside me, then think again, take it and lay it across my knees to examine the firing mechanism. Frederick's equipment was blown away into the mud. I've got his revolver.

If they haven't come by dark we have a chance. If Frederick rests he'll be strong enough to move. I can get him out of the shell-hole. Once we're out, the flashes from the guns will show me where the line is. Men have come back long after everyone's given them up. Spike Rowe did. He crawled from shell-hole to shell-hole. He fell asleep in one, he said, didn't know how long he slept, maybe a day and a night and day, then he came on. The worst danger he was in was when our sentries shot at him before he started singing out in English. His eyes were white all round and his body black with earth that had blown into him from the shell-blast that ripped his tunic and trousers off. All he had on him was rags. Every grain of his skin was full of dirt.

'Where's that fucking Sunlight Soap to,' said Dickie Fadge, as he knelt beside Spike and unwrapped, very gently, the last rags of his puttees. Spike didn't flinch. He looked down at himself as if he didn't know what was there.

'Cleanest fighter in the world, that's the British Tommy, did you know that, Spikey,' said Jack Peach, and he held his can of cold tea to Spike's mouth. It gaped open and the tea ran down his chin.

My head pounds and I begin to believe that I'm wounded too, even though I know I'm not. They'll come back. They will retake the shell-hole. There's nothing to stop them. Maybe they already know we're down here and they are muttering, out of hearing, deciding what's best. Chuck in a couple of grenades first, to flush us out. They're safe in their trenches, which are like palaces compared to ours. Twelve foot deep at least. Their sandbags are darker than ours. They dig good drainage channels under their duckboards so they're not slopping in muddy water. I've never been in a German trench but Blanco says they're like blooming Buckingham Palace. For a moment I let myself think of us coming back like Spike. Cold tea on our chins. The blessed slop of mud at the bottom of the trench.

'Frederick,' I whisper, and shake his shoulder gently. Nothing happens. His head lolls. For a moment I think he's dead and my animal self leaps up in relief: Now I won't have to crawl. I can run. Now I can get away.

But a bit of breath smoors out of him, on to my hand. I light another match, cup it, look around in case a rat is watching us. They won't attack a man that they know is living.

66 99 f) Although the breeze is slight, the noise of the sea surges up in it.

And behind the noise of the sea there are cries, like children playing. I brush my hands off. I'll finish the hoeing.

As I walk down the field, a movement catches my eye. Far away, on the coast path that runs up from the town, there are specks moving. I shade my eyes.

I count five, ten, twenty of them. There must be a wreck, I tell myself, and they are going out to the cliffs to watch the lifeboat. That's the only reason for such a stream of people. But I know that there's no wreck. The sea is bare.

I have my hoe in my hand, clenched tight. They are coming up the coast path, disappearing into the dips of the land, and then suddenly they're much closer as the path rises. Soon they'll be at the point where the path to Mary Pascoe's cottage separates from the main path, and runs left between walls of furze.

I plunge my hoe into the earth. At the top of my land there is a broken-down wall, with a bramble entanglement over it. I've no wire-cutters but I can get through. I stand still, watching for them to come to the turn. I don't think they can see me yet, although I can see them. The doctor with his hat: no, he's not there. He's too old and fat to be in the advance party. There are men in uniform: well, of course. What else do you expect? They surge and swarm. Now the first ones are coming to the turn, and the others push and shove in behind them. If they go ahead, I'll still see them. If they disappear –

They are gone. I leap to the wall, and am on it and over it as stripes of blood spring out on my hands. The brambles pull at me to drag me down but I don't let them. I raise my boots high and trample them, kicking, wading, shoving myself forward through the stench of bracken. I'm making for the field path that runs off the downs to the sea. I duck into the dense mass of stalks and thorns. They tear me but I don't flinch. I'm on my belly now, wriggling through. Blood runs down my face into my mouth and I lick it away and shake my head to clear my eyes.

A narrow snaking path runs between the roots. I'm not sure if it's the right one but it's going downhill and I decide to risk it. Still crouching low, I run with fire in my back. But the cover is falling away now, to my hips, to my thighs, to my knees. I am exposed. I glance back and see that they have come to the top of the wall and are plunging after me. A cry rises behind me. They are baying as they pour over the wall and I know that I can't hide now, I must run. I pump my legs high so my feet won't catch in the roots and my boots pound the path. I am upright now, visible for miles. I run with my blood thundering in my head. My feet find their way blindly. The path won't run straight but I daren't leave it for fear of being tangled and caught. I run on, jinking stones, sending up the whirr and shriek of a pheasant. Even then I think: If I had my gun, I could have got him.

They are no nearer. I'm losing them. I'll outrun them and double back like a hare to my hiding place until dark, and then I'll walk over the moors and downs all the way to Simonstown. Or no. They'll be watching the station. I glance behind me again. They have fallen back for sure. But my eye catches another movement and I see that they're peeling away, left and right, to cut me off. They will block the coast path in both directions, and chase me down to where they can catch me. Whichever way I go, they'll be there. It's the advantage of numbers, I think to myself, and I laugh, or I would laugh, if I had breath, remembering Sergeant Morris and the German trench we were to walk into, cool as cucumbers.

If they'd taped out the ground, I couldn't know it better. Left here, behind this boulder. I stop, and peer round the side. They have stopped too, and are lagging, faltering at the loss of me. I might dig myself in here. But no. They'll surround me, and then they'll move forward, beating the ground, until they're so close they can join hands and have me.

They'll shut me up in a hole in Bodmin. I thought of hanging as if it was stepping free into the air, but it's a man in a dark hole dropped into a darker. They'll put quicklime on me and bury me in the prison yard. I shall never get out. A flash of panic goes over me, brighter than a flare. It sears me through but it lights up the ground I've got to cover.

I push away the boulder. Breath burns in my chest as I run on and I hear the cry come up behind me, ragged at first and then strengthening as it's taken up from all sides. They've occupied the paths, but ahead of me the sea shines. All at once confidence floods into me. I am sure that I can outrun them this time. I'm not a child now. I'll do what they don't expect: I'll double this way, and race back for the town. I know a hundred places to hide there. I reach wet granite where the stream runs down, and splash into the water, thinking to hide my traces. The furze grows high again and I duck down, going lightly, willing my back not to show above the furze. But again it tricks me, thinning out and showing me to them. I smell myself, the stink of fear that's drawing them.

They show baldly now. A party behind me, coming on, six or seven making inwards on my left, the coast path blocked to my right. I know them all. Mark Relubbus, the Sennen cousins. There's Quicky, with the rest of them, come up from the lodge. There's Dolly Quick, picking up her skirts and racing in the rear. Who'd have thought the old woman would have so much speed in her? Geoff Paddick is pounding down from Venton Awen, and his sisters in their breeches. Even Enoch's come out of his hole, with his tangled hair flapping in the breeze. Wherever I look, there they are.

I can't hide, so I go higher, up to the steep edge of the rock-strewn slope that slants seawards. I look towards the town. It's too far away, and there's no cover anywhere.

I can still outrun them. I push off from the rock and hurl myself down the path. I'm in no-man's-land, ahead of them all. They come in from the left and from the right but the path shines grey ahead of me. Now I'm out of the furze and on to close-bitten turf that bounces under my heels and makes me go faster. Boulders rise up to block my way but I swerve past them. It's steep now and I'm going down so fast that I am almost flying. Behind me the noise rises to a roar but the breeze carries it away. They won't get me now. I look up and ahead of me there's the coast path and beyond it the lip of turf. My feet touch the path and drag me to a stop. I can't go forward. The cliff edge stands in my way. Far below I hear the sea boiling. I look behind, and see them still coming. I look to my left and to my right, and they are closing in like cats from both directions. Mark and Tony Relubbus, the Sennen

boys, Andrew Sennen lagging back, his sister screeching insults into the wind. Two policemen in greatcoats and helmets. There's the doctor's hat, bobbing down the furze. Dolly Quick and Ellen Tehidy. I even think I see Mr Dennis, dodging for a better viewpoint, but it can't be him. I see all their faces within a couple of seconds, as bright as if the flare had lit them. I am trapped. They've got me.

'You old blowviator,' says a voice in my ear. I spin round. I can't believe I didn't see him before. There he is, standing on the edge of the cliff, easily balancing. We always dared each other to stand as close to the edge as we could. He's winning this time.

'Frederick!'

He's not in uniform. Of course he wouldn't be, not back here. The war's over. He's wearing a dark blue jersey, and there's not a speck of mud on him. He looks just as he always did.

'Come on,' he says, and he stretches out his hand to me. I can't quite reach it. I go forward, one step and then another. Behind me I hear a groan of disappointment. They don't like it that Frederick's helping me. They want me hanging on the wire. But the sun's shining, the same old sunlight as ever. It shines on Frederick's hair and his clean skin, and on the wild sea behind him. I still hesita

te. I'm not sure that I can reach him. He seems to understand this without my saying anything, because he says, 'Come on, I'll give you a hand,' and suddenly he is very close. I breathe his skin and his hair. He holds out his hand to me, and this time I take it easily. It's warm now. 'That was a hell of a stunt, BB,' he says, and we step out together.

2.18. Colson Whitehead. *The Underground Railroad* (2021)

Colson Whitehead was born in 1969 in New York City. He is an American author of innovative novels which explore such issues as racism, the conflict between society and individual, but he often uses the fantastic events and imagery. Whitehead graduated from Harvard University. His early career started with writing various critical reviews.

Whitehead's first novel *The Intuitionist* (1999) was influenced by his childhood love of fantasy fiction. In it a black elevator inspector relies on her intuition and even poses as a detective in unraveling a case. Another acclaimed novel is *John Henry Days* (2001) based on a character from African American folklore. The novel *Zone One* (2011) describes a post-apocalyptic America after a virus which turned people into zombies.

After the success of *The Underground Railroad* (2016), winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, Whitehead published *The Nickel Boys* (2019) which won the same award. The book is based on real historical events of the 1960s and exposes discrimination of African Americans.

During his career Whitehead taught at colleges and universities throughout the United States. He participated in speaking engagements. Whitehead was the recipient of a MacArthur fellowship (2002) and a Guggenheim fellowship (2013), among his other honours.

The Underground Railroad pictures a slave catcher who pursues a run-away slave girl, Cora. She manages to escape by the railroad tracks. Her journey takes place in the underground railroad. Each stop is like a new story of slavery. Cora and her friend Caesar go from Georgia to South Carolina, which makes their life more tolerable. However, the slave catcher Ridgeway is after them. Cora learns about falsehoods of the official slave history as well as the inhuman experiments the local hospital may be conducting on African Americans. The underground railroad saves her life again.

There are several other places that Cora travels to escaping slavery. In North Carolina, where she is captured, she witnesses still more horrors of slave life, the hanging of black people and other cruelties. In Tennessee, which was destroyed by wildfires, Cora is rescued by mere chance. An underground railroad conductor takes Cora to Indiana, the place that provides her with freedom, schooling and a romance. However, a bout of violence from a white community results in a bloody massacre and Cora's new enslavement. It is the underground railroad that saves her again.

Discussion

1. Follow Cora's family story. What happened to her grandmother and her mother?
2. What do the underground railway stations reveal about the history of slavery? Describe the most conspicuous events and scenes.
3. Describe Ridgeway. Why is he incessantly after Cora?
4. Which companions in her escapes does Cora find and lose?
5. In your opinion, which events in the book reflect historical truth, and which serve as condensed imagery of the horrors of slavery?
6. Divide the novel's characters into two groups: those who are kind to Cora and those who hurt and betray her.
7. Comment on the image of the underground railroad. What can it stand for? Why does the author invent it in his book?
8. How would you characterize the style of the novel?
9. What are the novel's underlying ideas?

In this episode, Cora is captured again with a few others and is being driven in a wagon. Read and comment on the treatment of slaves, and on the ways the author reveals the tragedy of the black Americans.

"JESUS, carry me home, home to that land…"

Jasper wouldn't stop singing. Ridgeway shouted from the head of their little caravan for him to shut his mouth, and sometimes they halted so Boseman could climb into the wagon and clout the runaway on the head. Jasper sucked the scars on his fingers for a short interval, then resumed his crooning. Quietly at first so that only Cora could hear. But soon he'd be singing again, to his lost family, to his god, to everyone they passed on the trail. He'd have to be disciplined again.

Cora recognized some of the hymns. She suspected he made up many of them; the rhymes were crooked. She wouldn't have minded it so much if Jasper had a better voice, but Jesus had not blessed him in that department. Or with looks – he had a lopsided frog face and oddly thin arms for a field hand – or with luck. Luck least of all.

He and Cora had that in common.

They picked up Jasper three days out of North Carolina. Jasper was a delivery. He absconded from the Florida cane fields and made it to Tennessee before a tinker caught him stealing food from his pantry. After a few weeks the deputy located his owner, but the tinker had no means of transport. Ridgeway and Boseman were drinking in a tavern around the corner from the jail while little Homer waited with Cora and the wagon. The town clerk approached the famous slave catcher, brokered an arrangement, and Ridgeway now had the nigger chained in the wagon. He hadn't reckoned the man for a songbird.

The rain tapped on the canopy. Cora enjoyed the breeze and then felt ashamed for enjoying something. They stopped to eat when the rain let up. Boseman slapped Jasper, chuckled, and unchained the two fugitives from the wagon floor. He offered his customary vulgar promise as he knelt before Cora, sniffing. Jasper's and Cora's wrists and ankles remained manacled. It was the longest she had ever been in chains.

Crows glided over. The world was scorched and harrowed as far as they could see, a sea of ash and char from the flat planes of the fields up to the hills and mountains. Black trees tilted, stunted black arms pointing as if to a distant place untouched by flame. They rode past the blackened bones of houses and barns without number, chimneys sticking up like grave markers, the husked stone walls of ravaged mills and granaries. Scorched fences marked where cattle had grazed; it was not possible the animals survived.

After two days of riding through it, they were covered in black grime. Ridgeway said it made him feel at home, the blacksmith's son.

This is what Cora saw: Nowhere to hide. No refuge between those black stalks, even if she weren't fettered. Even if she had an opportunity.

An old white man in a gray coat trotted by on a dun horse. Like the other travelers they passed on the black road, he slowed in curiosity. Two adult slaves were common enough. But the colored boy in the black suit driving the wagon and his queer smile discomfited strangers. The younger white man with the red derby wore a necklace adorned with pieces of shriveled leather. When they figured out these were human ears, he bared a line of intermittent teeth browned by tobacco. The older white man in command discouraged all conversation with his glowering. The traveler moved on, around the bend where the road limped between the denuded hills.

Homer unfolded a moth-eaten quilt for them to sit on and distributed their portions on tin plates. The slave catcher allowed his prisoners an equal share of the food, a custom dating to his earliest days in the job. It reduced complaints and he billed the client. At the edge of the blackened field they ate the salt pork and the beans Boseman had prepared, the dry flies screeching in waves.

Rain agitated the smell of the fire, making the air bitter. Smoke flavored every bite of food, each sip of water. Jasper sang, "Jump up, the redeemer said! Jump up, jump up if you want to see His face!"

"Hallelujah!" Boseman shouted. "Fat little Jesus baby!" His words echoed and he did a dance, splashing dark water.

"He's not eating," Cora said. Jasper had foregone the last few meals, screwing his mouth shut and crossing his arms.

"Then it doesn't eat," Ridgeway said. He waited for her to say something, having grown used to her chirping at his remarks. They were on to each other. She kept silent to interrupt their pattern.

Homer scampered over and gobbled down Jasper's portion. He sensed Cora staring at him and grinned without looking up.

The driver of the wagon was an odd little imp. Ten years old, Chester's age, but imbued with the melancholy grace of an elderly house slave, the sum of practiced gestures. He was fastidious about his fine black suit and stovepipe hat, extracting lint from the fabric and glaring at it as if it were a poison spider before flicking it. Homer rarely spoke apart from his hectoring of the horses. Of racial affinity or sympathy, he gave no indication. Cora and Jasper might as well have been invisible most of the time, smaller than lint.

Homer's duties encompassed driving the team, sundry maintenance, and what Ridgeway termed "bookkeeping." Homer maintained the business accounts and recorded Ridgeway's stories in a small notebook he kept in his coat pocket. What made this or that utterance from the slave catcher worthy of inclusion, Cora could not discern. The boy preserved worldly truism and matter-of-fact observations about the weather with equal zeal.

Prompted by Cora one night, Ridgeway maintained that he'd never owned a slave in his life, save for the fourteen hours Homer was his property. Why not? she asked. "What for?" he said. Ridgeway was riding through the outskirts of

Atlanta – he'd just delivered a husband and wife to their owner, all the way from New York – when he came upon a butcher trying to square a gambling debt. His wife's family had given them the boy's mother as a wedding gift. The butcher had sold her during his previous stretch of bad luck. Now it was the boy's turn. He painted a crude sign to hang around the boy's neck advertising the offer.

The boy's strange sensibility moved Ridgeway. Homer's shining eyes, set in his round pudgy face, were at once feral and serene. A kindred spirit. Ridgeway bought him for five dollars and drew up emancipation papers the next day. Homer remained at his side despite Ridgeway's halfhearted attempts to shoo him away. The butcher had held no strong opinions on the subject of colored education and had permitted the boy to study with the children of some freemen. Out of boredom, Ridgeway helped him with his letters. Homer pretended he was of Italian extraction when it suited him and let his questioners sit with their bewilderment. His unconventional attire evolved over time; his disposition remained unchanged.

"If he's free, why don't he go?"

"Where?" Ridgeway asked. "He's seen enough to know a black boy has no future, free papers or no. Not in this country. Some disreputable character would snatch him and put him on the block lickety-split. With me, he can learn about the world. Find purpose."

Each night, with meticulous care, Homer opened his satchel and removed a set of manacles. He locked himself to the driver's seat, put the key in his pocket, and closed his eyes.

Ridgeway caught Cora looking. "He says it's the only way he can sleep."

Homer snored like a rich old man every night.

2.19. Louise Erdrich. *The Night Watchman* (2020)

Louise Erdrich was born in Little Falls, Minnesota, in 1954. She is an author of novels, poetry, and children's books featuring Native American characters and settings. She was one of the first groups of Native girls to be admitted to college, and she earned an A.B. in English. Later, she received her Master of Arts degree from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. She was married to Michael Dorris, also an author, with whom, as she later said, she made up plots for her future novels. Louise Erdrich is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, a federally recognized tribe of the Anishinaabe (also known as Ojibwa and Chippewa).

Erdrich's name is primarily associated with the themes of Native American life. Among her 28 books, there are 18 award-winning novels, with *The Night Watchman* awarded the 2021 Pulitzer Prize.

Erdrich began her literary career in 1984 with the novel *Love Medicine* that explores the lives of a fictional Indian community and is told in multiple narrative voices. The novel gave impetus to the "Love Medicine series" adding another six books to it.

The Master Butchers Singing Club (2003) is one of the novels that do not revolve around the Native American peoples – it looks at the German American cultural tradition, as there are Erdrich's ancestral roots in it.

In *The Plague of Doves* (2008), a novel from another book series, the "Justice series", Erdrich explores the lives of the fictional Pluto townsfolk where a murder happened many years ago in a farming family and has not been resolved.

The writer's award list is impressive and includes such prestigious literary prizes as the American Academy of Poets Prize (1975), the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas (2000), the 2012 National Book Award for Fiction for the novel *The Round House*, the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

The novel *The Night Watchman* is set in the Turtle Mountain Reservation of the 1950s, and its plot is based on the facts of life of Louise Erdrich's grandfather, the activist of the Native American resistance movement. The Turtle Mountain Reservation is the residence area of Chippewa Indians – a Native American tribe of Ojibwa and Métis peoples who resisted the so-called Indian termination – a policy of the US government to forcefully assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society.

The novel's title character is Thomas Wazhashk, and he is the night watchman at the jewel bearing plant in this reservation. As a Chippewa Council member, he is well aware of the repressive nature of the new "emancipation" bill which is about to be adopted soon in relation to the members of his community. The lands, the traditional way of life and the ethnic identity of his tribe are thus threatened.

Thomas tries to save his tribal community, its very existence. But "emancipation" has already affected his niece, Patrice Paranteau, who, travelling to Minnesota to find her vanished sister, comes across new customs, exploitation and a different system of modern values which oppose the traditional life of the tribe.

In addition to a faithful recording of the historical facts, the narrative is rooted in the beauty of nature and human relationships. The richness and variety of this life panorama is enhanced by different perspectives of other characters.

Discussion

1. Explain in detail the surface declaration of the new law concerning the reservation, its essence and its true implications.
2. How are the lives of ordinary community members affected by the political decision made?

3. Give a character profile of Thomas Wazhashk.
4. The character list includes about a hundred names. They appear and disappear never to take part in the story again. What effect does the novel gain with this technique?
5. The plot line of Patrice Paranteau is one of the central to the story. What role does she play in the author's design?
6. Which of the characters bear the local, ethnic or other specific colour to help recreate the motley picture of life of a Native American tribe? Consider also their occupations and professions: a teacher, a boxer, a cook, a student, a superintendent, a missionary, a farmer, a business owner.
7. Which scenes / moments in the novel do you personally find most enlightening / emotionally strong / important for understanding the key ideas?

These excerpts open up some bright descriptions, events and speculations from the panorama of an American Indian community life pictured in the novel. What key ideas do these passages highlight?

a) The government attributed their focus to Indian blood and training in Indian beadwork. Thomas thought it was their sharp eyes – the women of his tribe could spear you with a glance. He'd been lucky to get his own job. He was smart and honest, but he wasn't young and skinny anymore. He got the job because he was reliable and he knocked himself out to do all that he did as perfectly as he could do it. He made his inspections with a rigid thoroughness.

As he moved along, he checked the drilling room, tested every lock, flipped the lights on and off. At one point, to keep his blood flowing, he did a short fancy dance, then threw in a Red River jig. Refreshed, he stepped through the reinforced doors of the acid washing room, with its rows of numbered beakers, pressure dial, hose, sink, and washing stations. He checked the offices, the green-and-white-tiled bathrooms, and ended up back at the machine shop. His desk pooled with light from the defective lamp that he had rescued and repaired for himself, so that he could read, write, cogitate, and from time to time slap himself awake.

Thomas was named for the muskrat, wazhashk, the lowly, hardworking, water-loving rodent. Muskrats were everywhere on the slough-dotted reservation. Their small supple forms slipped busily through water at dusk, continually perfecting their burrows, and eating (how they loved to eat) practically anything growing or moving in a slough. Although the wazhashkag were numerous and ordinary, they were also crucial. In the beginning, after the great flood, it was a muskrat who had helped remake the earth.

In that way, as it turned out, Thomas was perfectly named.

b) Water Earth

Rubbing the back of her aching neck, Patrice walked slowly down the grass road. She knew her mother's people would be there, camped outside. There they were. A couple of frayed canvas tents, lean-to shelters streaked with dried mud. A cooking fire. Lake stones held up an ironwood branch from which a kettle was suspended just over tiny flames. The stumps that people would use to sit on were pulled away from the woodpile and arranged around the fire. At the edge of the clearing around the house, by the sweat-lodge frame, there was another tent with the open shape that signified that a jiisikid was among the visitors. Zhaanat had sent word to her cousin Gerald to come down across the border, and help her locate her daughter. That was one of the things the jiisikid did. Find people. Gerald, or the spirit who entered Gerald, would fly down to the Cities in a trance and see what was going on. He would find out why for the last five months Vera had not written, not reported in to the relocation program, not talked to anyone from the tribe who lived down there now.

Zhaanat kept a fresh bough of pine over the door. This morning, she had burned pine needles with cedar and bear root. The dim house was fragrant with the smoke. Gerald was sitting at the table with a few other people. They were drinking tea and laughing. In between jokes, they were discussing the ceremony with Zhaanat – how it would be run and who might show up with other questions, how long they should wait, if they should set up the sweat lodge too, what colors of cloth to tie in the branches and in what order. Who would lead on each song. They teased one another. Details. Patrice never talked about this part of her family's life with those who would not understand. For one thing, they wouldn't get how everything was funny. But the colors and the details reminded her of how the Catholics chose their colors and fixated on their sacraments. As if these things mattered to spirits or to the Holy Ghost.

Patrice had come to think that humans treated the concept of God, or Gizhe Manidoo, or the Holy Ghost, in a childish way. She was pretty sure that the rules and trappings of ritual had nothing to do with God, that they were ways for people to imagine they were doing things right in order to escape from punishment, or harm, like children. She had felt the movement of something vaster, impersonal yet personal, in her life. She thought that maybe people in contact with that nameless greatness had a way of catching at the edges, a way of being pulled along or even entering this thing beyond experience.

"Uncle!" She hugged Gerald, and shook hands all around. Then, with a cup of tea, she slipped behind her curtain, only to find her mother lying in her bed, fast asleep.

Patrice put her cup on the stool beside the bed, and lowered herself to sit on the edge of the mattress. She thought by sitting down she'd wake her mother, but Zhaanat slept heavily on her back, worn out by the long struggle with Patrice's

father, who had at last hopped a train or so they'd heard. Patrice glanced at the pepper can she kept on her windowsill. She had filled it with decoy money, and it looked like he'd found and taken it. A relief. Her real stash was buried underneath the linoleum floor. Her magazines and newspapers were neatly piled next to the bed. Look. Ladies' Home Journal. Time. Juggie Blue saved whatever the teachers discarded for her niece Valentine, and when Valentine was done with them she gave the magazines to Patrice.

The window faced west and the last of the sunlight, shifting through the golden leaves of birch trees, flickered across her mother's finely made face. Pleasant lines starred out from the corners of her eyes. Arched lines set off her slight smile. Her hair was long and the smooth braids had accidentally, comically, swept upward over her head, so that it seemed she was falling. Her arms were bent at the elbows and her powerful small hands lay still across her chest. Her unusual hands that frightened some people. Patrice shared her mother's tilting eyes, strength, and willful energy. But not her hands. They were Zhaanat's alone.

Zhaanat's dress was made of midnight-green calico dotted with tiny golden leaves. The style was from the last century, but Patrice knew it was only a few months old. Her mother had sewed the old-time dress from over four yards of cloth. The sleeves were slim and ran down to her wrists. There were shell buttons in the front, and the dress had a sweeping gathered skirt. Beneath it, Zhaanat wore woolen men's underwear, a dull red-orange color. Her moccasins were deerhide with rawhide soles, decorated with colored thread, blue and green. She often wore a brown plaid shawl. She had pulled the edges of it around her shoulders before she slept, as if for protection. Patrice smoothed her hand along the shawl's fringes and her mother opened her eyes.

Patrice could tell from her mother's frown of confusion that she'd slept so heavily she didn't know where she was. Then Zhaanat's face sharpened and her lips curved away from her teeth. She pulled the shawl closer.

"Damn if I know how I got here," she murmured.

"Gerald's out there."

"Good. He'll find her."

Patrice nodded. Gerald had found people now and then through the years, but sometimes he flew in circles. Sometimes their place was hidden.

That night, he flew for a long time, inhabited by a particular spirit. After a while he did find Vera. She was lying on her back, wearing a greasy dress, a cloth across her throat. She was motionless, but she wasn't dead. Perhaps she was asleep. Patrice would have thought that her uncle had found an image of her mother from that afternoon, except that Gerald said he had found her in the city, and there was a form beside her. A small form. A child.

The next day, Patrice put aside the troubling, and yet reassuring, information from the jiisikid, and jumped into the backseat of Doris Lauder's car. It was a

rainy fall morning and Patrice was extremely grateful to be picked up and brought to work. She offered, as she had before, to contribute money for gasoline. Doris refused with a vague wave, saying that she'd be driving anyway.

"Maybe next month." She smiled into the mirror.

"Maybe I'll be driving next month," said Valentine. "Daddy is fixing up a car for me."

"What kind?" asked Doris.

"Probably an all kinds of car," said Valentine. "You know. A car made of other cars."

The rain streamed in silvery bolts across the back window. Nobody spoke for a while.

"I hear Betty Pye's coming back to work today," said Valentine.

"Oh goodness," said Doris, with an abrupt laugh.

Betty had taken her year's week of paid sick leave to get her tonsils removed. At her age! Thirty years. She'd gone to Grand Forks for the operation because it was apparently more serious to have them removed as an adult. But she'd been adamant about doing it. She'd insisted that her neck swelled up every November and stayed thick all through the winter and she was through with that. The doctors had examined her throat and told her that her tonsils were unusually large, "real germ collectors." Everybody knew the details.

"I can't wait to hear how it went," said Patrice.

The two in the front seat laughed, but she hadn't said it to be mean. Betty would certainly make her operation into a drama. Patrice didn't know Betty very well, but work went so much faster when she was there. And Betty was, indeed, very much present when the women arrived at the jewel bearing plant. Betty's round face was a bit ashen, and her voice box hadn't healed yet. She spoke in a thready croak. But as always she was round and rolling, wearing green checks. A focused worker, she did her job. She had brought a large covered bowl of rice pudding for lunch, and when she swallowed her eyes watered. She was quiet all through work, whispering that it hurt like hell to talk. As they left for the day, Betty slipped a folded piece of paper to Patrice, and walked off. As Doris and Valentine spoke in the front seat, now pitying Betty for the pain she obviously suffered, Patrice took out the paper and read, I heard your looking for your sis. My cousin lives in the Cities. She saw her and wrote to you – with her L hand because she broke her R finger pointing out my faults. That's Genevieve for you. Watch the mail.

Patrice folded up the paper and smiled. She was drawn to Betty because she was so much like her sister in her ability to make life's bitterness into comedy. Broke her right finger pointing out my faults. What did that even mean? She tipped her head back, closing her eyes.

On Saturday morning, Patrice put on the swing coat she'd pulled from the piles of mission-store clothing. What a find. It was a lovely shade of blue, lined

with flannel wool under top-quality rayon. The coat was tailored, and had a fine shape. She tied on a red and blue plaid scarf, and shoved her hands in the coat pockets. There was a path through the woods that would take her four miles, straight into town and the post office. Or she could walk the road and likely get picked up. Although the sky had cleared, the ground was still wet. She did not have overboots, and didn't want to soak her shoes. Patrice took the road. It wasn't long before she was picked up. And by Thomas Wazhashk. He pulled his car over slightly ahead of her and waited. A rope tied down the trunk lid, and she could see the dull galvanized tin of their water cans. One lucky thing about living so far back in the bush, their spring still ran. And it ran clear. Most people closer in, near town, or out in prairie land, had lost their water or cattle had ruined their springs. Even the dug wells were drying out.

Thomas and Zhaanat were cousins – Patrice was unclear on exactly how they were related and "cousins" was considered a general word that covered a host of relationships. Thomas was an uncle to her and so his sons were also cousins. She sped forward and took the front seat when Wade got out and gave her the honor.

"Thank you for stopping, uncle."

"At least this time you're hitching on dry land."

Last summer, she had swum out to his fishing boat, surprised Thomas. She'd hitched a ride out of the lake. It tickled him to talk about it. He didn't know exactly why she'd been swimming out there so far.

Patrice was one of the only young people who addressed him in Chippewa, or Cree, or in a combination of the two. They didn't speak exactly alike but understood each other. If Wade was puzzled, let him absorb the language out of curiosity, thought Thomas. They chatted for a while and Thomas learned that Zhaanat had set up the special tent. Gerald had seen that Vera was alive and that she had a child beside her. Patrice got out at the mercantile, which also held the post office. He would return to pick her up. While he and Wade filled the water cans, Thomas thought about how his grandfather had consulted with someone like Gerald, long ago, when they needed to find out about Falon. So it happened they knew Falon had died well before the official message arrived.

On the way back, Patrice decided to read the letter from Betty Pye's cousin again, out loud, to her uncle.

I saw your sister down in the Cities, and something was wrong with her. Last I knew, she was at Stevens Avenue Apartments, number 206. I know because a number of Indians live there and I was staying on that floor too. Saw her in the hallway with her baby and she wouldn't talk to me.

Patrice told her uncle she wanted to walk back from his house. She needed to think. The road to her house ran alongside water, and the cool air smelled of rain drying off the yellow leaves. The cattails on the sloughs were soft brown clubs, the reeds still sharp and green. On the lake, wind was ruffling up blue-black waves so lacy that foam rimmed the beach. The sun beamed from between dark scudding clouds. Vera had always wanted to stay where she could see the birches and sloughs.

She had worked on an old cabin up the hill from their mother's house. Vera had camped there, trying to reclaim it. She had cleared away some trees that were trying to grow up through the floor, and she had drawn out her plans to make the cabin into her ideal house. Patrice had helped her work out a large room with a kitchen and a dining table, even two private bedrooms. Every detail of the drawing was labeled. Vera's penmanship was squared off and even, like on a real blueprint. There was a special close-up of a mullioned window with striped curtains. Patrice still had that picture. Vera, who dressed distinctively and was elegant rather than Pixie-cute, loved home economics class and had copied that window from a book called Ideal Home. She hadn't wanted to leave, but she'd fallen in love. It was sudden, and Zhaanat hadn't been in favor. Zhaanat had turned away rather than say goodbye to her daughter when she left for the Cities. Patrice knew this haunted her mother.

"Stay where you are. I'll find you," said Patrice, out loud. She snatched a stick from the path and struck at the grasses, sending out puffs of golden seed.

Patrice was nearly home when the clouds thickened to a dark sheet. She started running. Then quit. Her shoes. She couldn't ruin them. She bent over, took them off, bundled them beneath her coat, and kept walking in the rain. Took the grassy turnoff that led through the woods. Going barefoot was not a problem. She had done that all her life, and her feet were tough. Cold now, half numb, but tough. Her hair, shoulders, and back grew damp. But moving kept her warm. She slowed to pick her way through places where water was seeping up through the mats of dying grass. Rain tapping through the brilliant leaves the only sound. She stopped. The sense of something there, with her, all around her, swirling and seething with energy. How intimately the trees seized the earth. How exquisitely she was included. Patrice closed her eyes and felt a tug. Her spirit poured into the air like song. Wait! She opened her eyes and threw her weight into her cold feet. This must be how Gerald felt when he flew across the earth. Sometimes she frightened herself.

Before the trail gave into the clearing around her house, Patrice heard the yowl of spinning tires. She thought of Gerald's people, although he'd left before dawn. When she reached her mother's house and stepped around the far wall, she realized that the stuck whine was coming from the narrow, boggy grass path that led to the house. The other cars would have weakened the wet ground that morning, when Gerald and the rest of them left. Another car might have broken through. From outside the cabin, she raised the window near her bed, tossed her shoes in. She considered climbing in herself, but instead stepped around the house, across the smooth mud. She passed the wet black ashes of the cooking fire. Continued out onto the brushy track. At the entrance of the path she saw the turquoise and cream Buick that belonged to Pokey's teacher. Mr. Barnes was heaving at the front of the car, trying to push the left tire out of a watery hole. His large head of yellow hair was like a stack of straw. Hay Stack, they called him. Pokey was behind the wheel. She stopped. Tried to ease back into the leaves.

“c) Termination of Federal Contracts and Promises Made with Certain Tribes of Indians
Joint Hearing
before the
Subcommittees of the
Committees on
Interior and Insular Affairs
Congress of the United States
Eighty-third Congress
second session
Part 12
turtle mountain indians, north dakota
march 2 and 3, 1954

Statement of Thomas Wazhashk,
Chairman of the Advisory Committee,
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians,
North Dakota,
as well as statements by
other committee members,
jewel bearing plant employees,
a ghost, a PhD candidate,
and a stenographer.
Remarks by Senator Arthur V. Watkins
are direct quotes from
the Congressional Record.

They walked into a large room lined with honey-colored panels. An imposing semicircular bank of ornamented wood, divided into desklike seating, took up one end of the room. Muted light poured upon the structure through a vast window. A long rectangular table was placed in the forward center of the room, facing the great desk. They all shook hands with Senator Milton R. Young, mild and thoughtful, with a boxer’s granite chin. All the way from Fort Berthold, Martin Cross, friendly, craggy, astute, chatted with the senator. Thomas stayed by the table talking with them while the rest of the party sat down in the chairs directly behind the table. Moses and Juggie muttered to each other. Patrice tucked her hands in her lap. Beside her, Millie sat gazing straight ahead, in a trance of terror.

Millie was looking at a recessed panel behind the places where the senators would be seated. Perhaps it was a doorway. It was decorated with sharp vertical angles. Congruence is lucky, she thought. Lucky, lucky, lucky. And I’m not superstitious. As she did when in distress, she was also assessing the way objects lined up in the room. The doorway, if it was a doorway, was perfectly centered, which was reassuring. But the heavy drapes, pushing aside the flood of radiance coming through

the window, hung slightly crooked. This made Millie want to cry. And she did not ever cry. She steeled herself and took comfort from the great bronze sconces to either side – they defied geometry. The fixtures looked like outsize flashlights. Each admitted a glow that seemed feeble in the already light-flooded room. The flashlights diverted Millie, but now her blood fizzed in alarm as she rose. She took her oath with the others and seated herself at the desk to the left of Thomas. With rustles and low talk, the senators conferred. Millie calmed herself by checking and rechecking the page order of her statement. Senator Watkins began to speak. Millie panicked until she looked up at him and saw that he was yet another man who didn't know how to type.

To one side, below the giant desk, sat a woman in a severe suit. She posed her fingers over the keys of her stenotype, and began. Aha. There was no excuse for this sort of thing. It occurred to Millie, then, that the woman, the stenographer with the handsome machine, would also be taking down and typing up her words. Millie allowed this idea to slowly fill her with a secret confidence.

Senator Young spoke well and said exactly what the tribal committee members had hoped he would say. He insisted that the state could not step in and take over the responsibilities of the federal government. That, if anything, the government should fund an expensive job-training program on the reservation.

Thomas began.

First, the introductions, the courtesies, the insistence that the record show that this trip by tribal people to Washington had been paid for by the generosity of local people, not the government. Nothing was said about the boxing match.

Sitting behind Thomas in the row of supporters and interested parties, Patrice blinked and remembered Wood Mountain's broken eyebrow. For a moment that snowy day, her glasses had slipped and she saw how the scar had formed across the bone, a living and still healing interruption. What would she do about him?

Instead of arguing the premise of termination itself, the tribal committee had decided to buy time. The government's five-year plan was insufficient because the reservation was currently unable to sustain itself without support. Hammer that. Then as a point of outrage demand more money from the government.

A description of the Turtle Mountain Reservation.

A statement of strong opposition. Then a ladle of corn syrup—appreciation for the efforts and time of the government, extra dollops for Senator Watkins and Associate Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Rex Lee, the authors of the two measures that would strip the people of everything.

Watkins interrupted. Watkins started talking.

Thomas thought: Oh hell, stick with it, stick with it, don't let him give you the teacher-eye, don't let him throw his eight-dollar words at you, don't let him . . .

. . . and suddenly Roderick was in the room.

Roderick

The instant that Roderick saw Senator Arthur V. Watkins, he knew exactly who he was. Watkins was the teacher who'd taught the Palmer Method, the little man who'd whacked his hands with the ruler's edge, who'd pulled his ears, who'd screeched at him, who'd called him hopeless, who'd punished him for talking Indian. Watkins was the man who'd dragged Roderick to the cellar stairs and said to Thomas, "Would you care to join your friend?"

Senator Watkins: In my area, whites got the poor land on the reservation. Within a year, however, the Indians leased their allotments. They just didn't want to farm. That is true today. I think most of the Indian allotments are under lease to white people. That is why I seriously doubt that Indians like to farm.

Patrice, Thinking

He's another white farmer like Doris Lauder's family who picked up cheap Indian land after the taxes came due on allotments. I know damn well he didn't get the poor land because no white person would buy it. He got the only farmable land.

Senator Watkins: If I may ask, do you work, Mr. Wazhashk?

Thomas Wazhashk: Yes. I farm.

Senator Watkins: It is too bad we haven't more like you in these tribes.

Thomas Wazhashk: What farmable land there is on the reservation is mostly farmed by Indians.

Senator Watkins: I have noticed Indians, wherever I have seen them, in mechanical jobs, jobs requiring skill with their hands. They seem to like that.

Patrice

They seem to like that? I guess they do. I guess we do.

Millie

I won't look down at my dress. I won't get lost in my sleeves. But I'll be fine because I'm dressed in the elements of geometry. Beyond which I must not go in my thoughts until I have delivered my study.

Thomas Wazhashk: In view of the fact that employment has shown a considerable downward trend throughout the United States as a whole, we believe the relocation program is ill timed and would be fraught with insurmountable difficulties. We want to point out that the relocation program has limitations. It doesn't cover our problems.

Senator Watkins: I wouldn't say it covered them all. No. Because, after all, the government can't solve your problems for you. Most of them have to be solved by yourselves.

Thomas

Is that you, Roderick?

Roderick

Yes, it's me. Hold out. Don't get mad. They don't like an Indian to have brains. Ignore old Mr. Pantywaist and put your sentences together.

Senator Watkins: Oh, surely. There would be nothing permanently cured that you don't cure yourself. No government, no matter how benevolent, can put ambition into people. That has to be developed by themselves. You can't legislate morality, character, or any of those fine virtues into people.

You learn to walk by walking.

Thomas, Thinking

We didn't get to the Turtle Mountains by riding in a covered wagon.

Roderick and Thomas

For the rest of his life, when Thomas thought of the moment his teacher asked whether he wanted to join Roderick in the cellar, Thomas imagined saying, "Yes, yes, sling me down there, you scabby rat." But he hadn't said that. No, Thomas had gone silent and let Roderick take the blame. But it hadn't been entirely out of cowardice. No, because after all, it was just a cellar and Roderick had been in worse. No, because behind the teacher's back, Roderick shook his head at him to stay. He knew that kids had been forgotten down there a week at a time. No, it was strategy. From up above, Thomas could bust Roderick out.

Senator Watkins: Let me ask you a few questions about you personally. You don't have to answer if you don't want to. I am not requiring this of you, but it may help to illustrate the situation. What do you do for a living?

Thomas Wazhashk: As I mentioned, farming. Also I am one of the guards at the Turtle Mountain ordnance plant, the jewel plant, where they make jewel bearings.

Senator Watkins: What are jewel bearings?

Thomas Wazhashk: We have brought an example of a jewel bearing, as well as a magnifying glass, which you will need to see that jewel bearing. We also have an expert on this work. Miss Patrice Paranteau. May I call upon her to give expert witness?

Senator Watkins: She must be sworn in, but yes.

Patrice Paranteau (after being sworn in; head buzzing with fear, holding the card, the example, and magnifying glass): This little wire that you see here is a wire made out of tongue steel, and that is set in the machine and worked back and forth until you finally drill a hole in the jewel. Through the magnifying glass you will see there is a tiny hole through this jewel and everything is polished, inside and outside. It has to be to the certain dimensions stated on the card, which you see here, and it is also cupped, so that it will hold oil for lubrication purposes.

Senator Watkins (ignoring Patrice and addressing Thomas Wazhashk): What can these people do with the training for this work?

Thomas Wazhashk: I believe the average pay is 75 to 90 cents an hour. As for me, I take home $38.25 a week.

Senator Watkins: Some of the Indian women who have families labor there, too, don't they?

Thomas Wazhashk: Yes; most of the Indian women employed there have families.

Senator Watkins: Why do they take women, rather than men? You have plenty of men, haven't you?

Thomas Wazhashk: They give tests. They give you manual dexterity tests, and I believe the women are better in that than the men are. And now, if I may take the opportunity, Miss Millie Cloud is here to introduce her field research study conducted on the social and economic conditions on the Turtle Mountain Reservation.

Millie

"If this might be introduced into the record . . . ," said Millie.

Then she began.

Reading her study out went like a blur.

The questions were many.

So passed one hour, and the next. At last, a recess.

Roderick

Remember how you buttered that white teacher up to the teeth? Called him sir, sir this, sir that, thanked him constantly, asked his advice. Then stole the keys from his suit pocket? Then you let me out and slipped back the keys.

Thomas

"Should I try it?" Thomas whispered.

Thomas watched as Senator Watkins walked down the hall. With his small entourage, he walked down the stairs. Thomas followed Senator Watkins down the stairs. He found the senator's office and entered. He was about to explain who he was to a secretary, when Senator Watkins emerged from the inner office.

"Hello there," said Senator Watkins. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm here to thank you," said Thomas.

"Well, well," said the senator.

"I wanted to thank you for your concern for our people. You have obviously taken our situation to heart, and I was struck by the kindness showed to us in your carefully listening and thoughtfully weighing our testimony on the termination bill."

"In all of my days as a senator, nobody has ever thanked me for listening to their testimony."

"I call that an omission," said Thomas.

As he left the senator's office, he was thinking, I am and we are absolutely destitute and desperate. This is a sign of how bad things are. I am willing to forgo my dignity to try to butter you up to the teeth. I hope it helps our cause.

Goodbye

After the next day's testimony, the little delegation was anxious to leave the Capitol. Yet they lingered, as if their presence might still have some effect.

Section **3.** **Resources**

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Учебное пособие

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СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ РОМАН В ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНЫХ СТРАН

(на английском языке)

Ответственный за выпуск *М. С. Рогачевская*

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