



National
College *of*
Ireland

National College of Ireland

Revision Sessions April 2015
Leaving Cert. English Notes

Paper II

Role of Women in Othello Iago Shakespeare the Moor of Venice Essay

Discuss the role of women in Othello

Women are represented in a number of ways within the play, all of which give us insight into the workings of Shakespearean relationships and society. The three most prominent female characters are undoubtedly Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca. The social status and class of the women differs as does their conduct and, rather crucially, the way in which men act towards them.

Desdemona, as the heroine of the play provides the predominant focal point for women within the production. Desdemona is clearly a representation of the ideal woman, as is alluded to in almost every description of her within the play. She is initially introduced as a 'white ewe', a description juxtaposed against the rather crude 'black ram' (a description of Othello). Desdemona's purity is often juxtaposed against the rather racist attachment of a bestial aspect to Othello's character; 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse' this has the effect of purifying Desdemona to a greater degree, particularly after we are introduced to the virtuous Othello (who is apparently made bestial in her presence). Desdemona's innocence is more concretely shown in her reaction to Othello's demise into jealousy and violence; she suspects it is 'something sure of state' and never considers a personal reason for his behaviour. Indeed, even after being prompted by Emilia as to possibly jealousy with regard to herself, Desdemona replies; 'Alas I never gave him cause'. This insinuating that she rules out the idea because she did not 'give him cause', a naïve action, which implies her trust in Othello's judgement is too absolute. A further example of Desdemona's innocence is in her conversation with Emilia over adultery. Desdemona says 'Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong for the whole world', and does not believe that 'there is any such woman'. Desdemona's idealism is in stark contrast to Emilia's pragmatism, Emilia seems to speak sense, arguing that she would not cuckold her husband for petty things, 'but for the whole world' she would argue that it is a small price to pay for the entire planet.

The contrast between Emilia and Desdemona is key to the mechanics of the play. Emilia is a character rather ahead of her time, something that is really conveyed in what is now commonly referred to as her 'feminist speech'. In this, speech, Shakespeare, through Emilia comments on the dynamic of relationships and argues against the traditionalist view of women being subservient to their husbands, she goes as far as to suggest that the wrongs of women are as a direct result of the mistreatment by their husbands; 'The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.' It is difficult for us to interpret whether this speech is simply used to add depth to the character of Emilia or whether it was a sincere belief of Shakespeare's portrayed through Emilia. The fact that the speech itself adds little to the actual narrative may be taken to suggest that Emilia is simply used to deliver Shakespeare's own thoughts. However, such musing is purely speculative and cannot be supposed with any certainty. The critic 'Evan L. Wendel' in his essay 'Images of Womanhood in Shakespeare's Othello: Emilia as feminist' suggest that Emilia's recognition of the male 'use' of female; 'Then let the use us well', is done in such a way that inverts the Elizabethan double standards and pokes fun at them.

The presentation of Bianca within the play is in great contrast to that of both Emilia and Desdemona. Bianca presents the lowest class of woman, something that is most apparent in the way in which she is treated by men. Indeed, Iago plays on the great contrast between Cassio's treatment of Bianca and his treatment of Desdemona in order to trick Othello into believing in

Cassio's guilt. This contrast in treatment can be seen in Cassio's in the following exchanges; Cassio says to Desdemona when asking her to speak with Othello about his suspension;

'Madam, my former suit. I do beseech you

That by your virtuous mean I may again exist...

Cassio's treatment of Bianca is in complete contrast;

'Go to woman! Throw your vile guesses in the devil's teeth,

From whence you have them'

It is incredibly difficult to imagine Cassio speaking to Desdemona in this way, a fact which implies that social status for women in Elizabethan times was incredibly important, far more so than any personal virtue they may have had. This is in align with the Elizabethan view of 'The Great Chain of Being' in which social class determined once separation from God. Indeed, the play as a whole comments upon the inversion of social order, with Iago becoming Othello's 'master', a fact that is powerfully portrayed in Othello's 'I am bound to thee forever' at the end of Act III. The inversion of social class within the play can be seen as a cause for the chaos that ensues. Interestingly, it is on the male side that the inversion of social class occurs; the female proportion of characters maintain their social order and behave in accordingly their eventual collapse, culminating in the death of Desdemona and Emilia is as a direct result of the men. This can be interpreted as a rather feminist comment by Shakespeare, in that it implies that the tragedy is a direct result of the actions of the men. This is not dissimilar to the message in Emilia's feminist speech; 'the ills we do, their ills instruct us so'.

The concept of feminism is further portrayed through Desdemona and her choice of Othello as a partner. It is clear that in choosing Othello as a spouse, Desdemona has broken away from the traditional influence of the father in that she has not requested his permission, and indeed, she has married in secret. The anger of Brabantio is apparent when he states;

'Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see;

She hath deceived her father, and may thee'

The implication being that she is no longer in the control of men, and that if Brabantio as her father has lost his influence over her, then Othello as her husband is unlikely to exert any. Although this does to some extent illustrate a degree of feminism in Desdemona, it is later proven to be inaccurate. Othello, it appears, exerts such influence over Desdemona that after she denies his involvement in her death, she even goes as far as to say 'Commend me to my fine lord...'. Desdemona is a difficult character to interpret in terms of feminism, since her obedience to Othello appears to be as a consequence of her great love for him rather than her fear of him or feeling of subservience. Nevertheless, the absolute trust she places in him implies she views him as being almost above her threshold for understanding; she puts his anger and his violence toward her as a consequence of 'a matter of state', and does not attempt to investigate further; almost as though she feels it is above her.

In conclusion, I feel that women in 'Othello' are used in a number of ways, there is a strong feminist underlying in Emilia for example which is portrayed so well in the forward thinking 'feminist speech'. As a modern audience, 'Othello' provides an insight into the workings of

Elizabethan society and really helps us to understand the dynamic of male female relationships at the time

Manipulation Theme

Othello's villain, Iago, may be literature's most impressive master of deception. Iago plots with consummate sophistication, carefully manipulating Othello (without any real proof) into believing that Desdemona has been unfaithful. His understanding of the human psyche is phenomenal, as is his ability to orchestrate a complicated interweaving of pre-planned scenarios. Iago's deception is potent because of his patience, his cleverness, and what seems to be his intrinsic love of elegant manipulation.

Questions About Manipulation

1. Why does Iago want to manipulate Othello into believing Desdemona has been unfaithful?
2. How is it that Iago is so successful at manipulating everyone around him?
3. How does Iago's openness with the audience contrast with his treatment of other characters? Are WE ever manipulated by Iago's lies?
4. Is Iago's masterful manipulation of the characters in *Othello* plausible? Why or why not?

In *Othello*, Iago orchestrates Othello's downfall like a skillful playwright.

Iago's ultimate deception is not of Othello, Cassio, or Roderigo: it is of the audience. By refusing to tell Othello his motivations in Act 5, he is also refusing to tell us. We are strung along through *Othello* in the belief that all will be revealed, but it seems that the joke is on us.

Montague Language and Imagery

The Cage

- Allusion to Odysseus trapped in Hades (read 3 emails regarding this).
- His father is trapped in his own hell and struggles to find his way home
- The Underground is a metaphor to the Underworld of Odysseus
- Pathetic Fallacy when he arrives home and moment of bathos when we realise that he cannot connect with his father
- Enjambment reflects cinematic movement
- Nature is not a romantic entity in this poem Modernist

The Locket

- Enjambment reflects his emotional outburst in opening stanzas
- Also possible allusion from 'Family' in Odysseus
- Image of cocoon as she is wrapped in pain
- Influence of Modernist Movement evident here as Montague examines experience from his own life but uncovering universal truths.
- Personal pronoun reflects intimate and honest exploration of his life: Modernist

All Legendary Objects

- Haunting love lyric
- Allusion to Orpheus myth suggests the tentative nature of love. Line 16/17
- Framed stanza, vignettes
- Personal intimacies set up against a backdrop of the great sweeping landscape that his lover must traverse
- Typical of the Modernist, nature is used to evoke an imaginative response, and all these obstacles, 'the long imaginary plain,rain', become metaphors for the tensions experienced in a long distance relationship.
- Language of final stanza is reminiscent of old black and white movie.
- Cinematic technique
- Unlike Orpheus, Montague has found his Eurydice

The Welcoming Party

- Title suggestive of a festive occasion. Contradictory content creates a startling, shocking opening. The poem is the ultimate Trojan horse!
- Force and graphic detail of similes
- 'Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn'. Robert Burns
- Imagery is typical of the Modernist as Montague succeeds in achieving an incredible realization of Auschwitz. The similes mesh into a surreal evocation of the absolute horror /full extent of Nazi evil.
- The 'shades' : allusion to souls of dead in underworld
- 'Nest' is a place of birth, but here children emerge 'conjugating the verb to die'
- Glove should protect but here it is burnt and we see the skeletal face and teeth drawn tightly like the digits of the hand through charred material.
- Symbolism inverted in both similes

The Trout

- Assonance and gentle verbs create a sensual atmosphere
- Broad vowel sounds create and specific verbs reflect care and attention of Montague's adventure
- Sensual language used throughout

Enjambment in final two stanzas reflect final catch, suspense and tension also

Killing the Pig

- Powerful verbs: 'Squealing', 'Piercing', 'crushed'.
- Comparison of 'High pitched final effort' to 'plane, diva, electric saw, scrap being crushed'.
- Variety of sentence structure
- Monosyllabic words

Same Gesture

- Intimate love poem
- Pure celebration of love
- Religious imagery
- 'Secret room' is like the heart itself, a place where everything is possible: 'love, violence, hatred'
- Structure of poem reflects movement of lovers, enjambment of the lines reflects journey to oneness

- Religious and sacred nature of lovemaking evoked powerfully as the 'shifting of hands' reflects a graceful dance and becomes a 'Rite' with the formality and precision of 'court music'
-

Iago : class discussion

Manipulative

- He uses people's weakness to get what he wants, telling us he will 'poison [Othello's] delight.'
- He manipulate people's opinion of him: 'Honest Iago'
- Takes advantage of other characters naivety: relationship with Roderigo, 'put money in thy purse', 'thus do I ever make my fool my purse' 1:3 line381.
- Quickly comes up with an elaborate plan to foil Othello, constantly improvising and adapting his schemes to fit shifting conditions around him, as with the handkerchief.
- He uses others trust in him as fuel for his manipulation
- He manipulates the other characters in the play into playing a role in his master plan.
- He convinces Roderigo into thinking that Cassio must be killed in order for his love for Desdemona to come to fruition: 'Is the impediment most profitably removed, without the which there were no expectation of our prosperity?'
- Tells Brabantio about Othello and Desdemona's elopement: 'A black ram is tupping your white ewe'. 1:1 line 88

Evil

- According to the scholar A.C. Bradley, 'evil has nowhere else been portrayed with such mastery as in the character of Iago'
- He associates himself with the evil nature of the devil at the end of Act2.
- 'When devils will the blackest sins put on, they do suggest at first with Heavenly shows, As I do now.'

- He also states definitively: 'I hate the Moor' and begins his destructive plot 'But for [his] sport and profit.'
- He has destroyed Othello's life but won't give anyone the satisfaction of knowing why.
- He advises Othello to kill Desdemona even though she is completely
- innocent.
- **Responsible for all the misfortunes in the play**
 1. Cassio losing his role
 2. Othello's loss of trust in Desdemona (is it not Othello's jealousy?)
 3. Desdemona's death (Othello murders her?)
 4. Othello's suicide (He kills himself)
 5. Roderigo's murder
- (Be careful with 2, 3, and 4. Othello has choices, remember why he does all of the above? Jealousy)
- He backstabs Roderigo who then calls him an 'Inhuman dog'.
- He manoeuvres other characters as one would pieces in a game of chess and uses them to satisfy his own lust for evil.
- Gets Roderigo to tell Brabantio about his daughter and Othello
- Emilia and the handkerchief
- Roderigo to attack Cassio
- Othello contaminated by Iago's evil.
- He doesn't feel any remorse at the end of the play when he is caught and his psychopathic and evil plans are revealed.
- 'From this time forth I will never speak a word'
- This and other examples demonstrate the malevolent and evil nature of his personality.
- 'He is the slime that doth stick on filthy deeds'

Fearless

- Doesn't show fear when caught: 'This is the night that makes me or fordoes me quite'

- He is willing to deceive Othello a great and powerful warrior
- He murders Emilia in the presence of officials
- Murders Roderigo and attempted murder of Cassio is in the dark so not really in the open
- Shouts at an enraged Othello who grabs him by the throat: 'Thou art overwhelmed with thy grief, a passion most unsuited such a man'

Ambition

- Ambitious at the start to become lieutenant to Othello so thereby must ruin Cassio: 'If thou can'st thus cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport'
- What becomes of this? He soon changes his attitude and looks to ruin Othello.
- Coleridge suggests that he displays 'The motive hunting of a motiveless malignity'
- 'But for my sport and profit I hate the Moor'
- Iago is hedonistic rather than ambitious.

Misogynist

- Iago regards women as untrustworthy in their relationships and sexually promiscuous 2:1 line 117
- Iago uses Emilia as a pawn
- Iago repeatedly urges Emilia to keep quiet, calling her filth, a liar and a villainous whore and even threatening her with his sword 5:2 line 223-6
- Iago tries to shift the blame for Cassio's injuries onto Bianca
- Refers to Bianca as a 'hussy' and accuses her as using Cassio to get her 'bread and clothes'
- Iago refers to both his wife and Desdemona in disgraceful terms such as 'villainous whore' and sparks lustful thoughts in Cassio's mind about Desdemona (?) 'A parley to provocation'

- Iago suggests that most women are unfaithful, labelling them as 'monsters' who betray their husbands.

Appearance vs reality

Throughout the history of human beings there has been a general understanding that appearance may not always signify reality, essentially meaning in other words "looks can be deceiving". Shakespeare understands the relationship between appearance and reality and has hence embodied this concept within his play Othello. Shakespeare illustrates how a single manipulative character who embodies the concept of appearance vs reality can essentially be potentially destructive and cause harm to people within their surroundings through the art of deception. Despite the fact that appearance vs reality is practiced by almost every single human being on a daily basis it is truly emphasized by some character who tends to have a motive to achieve. Appearance vs reality is practiced in Othello by Iago whose character is driven by jealousy and has a motive to achieve and hence have turned to deception in order to achieve this motive.

In Shakespeare's play Othello appearance vs reality is practiced by Iago who is driven by his jealousy to achieve his evil motives. Throughout the play he aims to manipulate multiple characters in order to reach his goal. He appears to be helping everyone but in reality he is aiming to sabotage everyone, his deceptive nature ultimately leads to the execution of the tragedy and hence the death of many of his so called friends. Shakespeare displays Iago's manipulative ways to the audience through dramatic irony whereby the audience can see his reality however the characters cannot. This is clearly seen through the constant portrayal of Iago as "honest Iago" which indeed strongly contradicts his true nature. Iago's deceptive plan is to turn Othello on his wife by manipulating him to think that his best friend is having an affair with his wife. Iago utilizes many characters to achieve his goal and essentially his plans lead to the tragedy of Othello. Shakespeare's portrayal of appearance vs reality is part of a deeper message which is to never be deceived by anyone and never take anyone at face value.

appearance vs reality is witnessed in Othello through Iago's deceptive nature which is illustrated by the following quotes and example

technique
dialogue

quote/ example
" I follow him to serve
my turn upon him"

explanation
This is stating that Iago is going to make it look like he is so loyal to Othello, so that Othello thinks he is a good servant, so when the opportunity arises for Iago, Othello will not suspect him of anything, and surely have a good eye for Iago.

<i>foreshadowing</i>	<i>"I am not what I am"</i>	<i>In this scene Iago is essentially foreshadowing who he truly is he is basically telling the audience that he is not what he appears to be and in this case he appears to be a loyal to Othello however he plans to sabotage Othello</i>
<i>dramatic irony</i>	<i>" so please your grace, my ancient: A man he is of honesty and trust. "</i>	<i>This is a quote said by Othello which contains dramatic irony as the audience knows that Iago is disloyal however Othello has been deceived to believe that Iago is a man full of honesty and trust, this ultimately highlights the deceptive nature of humanity.</i>
<i>dialogue</i>	<i>" I hate the moor. My cause is harted; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. "</i>	<i>In this instance Iago is very clear cut and blunt to Rodrigo where he says that he hates the moor who is Othello and he wishes to destroy him this signifies Iago reality however in front of Othello Iago seems to be loyal and trustworthy.</i>

Shakespeare's theme of appearance vs reality has remained to be a dominant theme within Shakespeare's plays due to the simple fact that it is still practiced today by many people. Appearance vs reality is indeed a universally significant theme as it relates heavily to our human anatomy as it is present within every single human. During Venetian society respect, loyalty and honesty was highly valued and if someone appeared to have these qualities he could potentially manipulate many people. This was the case with Iago who appeared to be loyal and honest however in reality he was deceitful and rotten. Shakespeare is essentially warning humanity of the people who may appear to be good at face value however in reality they are evil.

Shakespeare understands the relationship between appearance and reality and have hence embodied this concept within their plays Othello. He illustrates how a single manipulative character who embodies the concept of appearance vs reality can essentially be potentially destructive and cause harm to people within their surroundings through the art of deception. The central message which this theme implies is that it is a human trait which is found within all contexts and hence it becomes universally significant. Shakespeare highlights humanity's inability to judge true from false as well as to highlight humanity's deceptive nature and potentially warn humanity of deceptive individuals.

'Othello'

Othello tells the story of a man who **allows his insecurities to destroy his life**. **Power and respect** sometimes come with a cost. Sometimes when we have worked hard to accomplish our goals, our insecurities can get the best of us. The title character of 'Othello' is powerful and respected general in public, but he is privately insecure about himself and the life he leads.

Othello is a general in the army of Venice who is described as a **Moor**, a native of North Africa. Racial differences make it difficult for Othello to live in European society. Act 1 Sc2. Othello is insecure about himself, particularly about his race, and he is occasionally the subject of overt racism. Despite his insecurities, he is viewed as a skilled soldier and leader, and he is a valuable part of Venetian society. The Venetian government trusts Othello as a soldier and puts him in command of an important voyage to Cyprus, where the Venetians defend themselves against the Turkish army.

However, even though he is praised for his skills as a soldier, his race often prevents him from getting the full respect of others in his personal life. For example, when Othello's antagonist speaks to Othello's white father-in-law, he says: 'Even now, now, very now, an **old black ram**/ Is tugging your **white ewe**. Arise, arise;/ Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, Or else the **devil** will make a grandsire of you:/ Arise I say!' (Act 1, Scene 1, Line 9). Here, Othello is described as an **animal and a devil** who is taking advantage of his innocent wife. He is made to seem polluted and dangerous, a person to be feared by society. The racial difference between Othello and his wife, Desdemona is the focal point of this speech.



Othello and Desdemona

Othello is a cultural and racial outsider in Venice, and it is his **nature as an outsider that attracts his wife**. Othello says he won Desdemona because of his stories of adventure and the life he'd lived. However, Desdemona's father, Brabantio, says that his daughter only loves Othello because of his **evil trickery, and he connects Othello's race with evil**. Although Othello knows his wife loves him, he lets **Iago**, a vengeful soldier, manipulate him into believing Desdemona was unfaithful. Iago is angry at Othello for passing him over and promoting a soldier named Cassio to the position of lieutenant. Because of this, Iago develops a plan to destroy Othello's life. If Othello was not **insecure about himself**, he may not have believed Iago's lies.

Othello has a number of positive qualities, such as being strong, prideful, and in control as a soldier. **Some of his negative qualities include insecurity regarding his race (being an African man in a European society), being naïve, and lacking control of his emotions**. Despite his power and respect as a soldier, Othello is still very naïve and insecure -

these qualities prove to be his **fatal flaw**, a weakness in his personality. Othello is naïve because he takes everything at face value and does not see the corruptness of others. Othello naïvely trusts Iago with private and personal matters he should have discussed with his wife; instead, Othello resorts to violence and kills the love of his life.

Othello changes from a noble and just groom who declares, “But that I love the gentle Desdemona,” (I,ii,27) to a foul-minded, irrational husband who vows, “I’ll tear her to pieces.” (III,iii,483) He changes from treating her gently to striking her in public, calling her a whore, and murdering her in an unfounded jealous rage.

Othello must start to realize that he can’t run his marriage using the same unbending discipline and **militaristic thinking** he uses to rule his soldiers. He must start to question Iago’s motives for accusing Desdemona of being unfaithful, and look beyond the surface of events for their true meaning and greater implications.

Othello is a man of action: His reputation as an effective warrior and leader earns him a command against the Turks and a position as governor of Cyprus; he seizes his chance at happiness with an expedient, secret marriage to Desdemona; he quickly determines Cassio’s drunken brawling is a disgrace to his rank and strips him of it; once he’s convinced of Desdemona and Cassio’s guilt, he orders Iago to execute Cassio and he kills his wife himself.

Othello moves to solve his problems by using linear thinking. When Brabantio accuses Othello of using witchcraft to seduce Desdemona, Othello suggests that she be summoned to give evidence of their courtship. When he’s disturbed by the commotion during the celebration, Othello demands the witnesses identify those responsible, weighs the evidence, and metes out a punishment. When Iago accuses Desdemona of adultery, **Othello asks for proof**. Having been presented with “evidence” Othello accepts it on face value, without considering why Iago is defaming Desdemona, or contemplating the larger issues surrounding the accusation.

Othello struggles with the idea that Desdemona is unfaithful: At first he refuses to believe it and he **demand**s proof; he flusters Desdemona when she cannot produce a handkerchief he has given her; he “overhears” Cassio speaking of his affair with Desdemona; he sees the handkerchief in the hands of Cassio’s mistress. Convinced that Desdemona has betrayed his love, Othello’s only option is to kill her. Facing her insanely jealous husband, Desdemona pleads innocence, when that fails, she begs for her life, then for one more day, then just to live until the morning. Othello rejects her requests and smothers her to death.

The characters fail to recognize and stop Iago’s malicious scheme against them. As a result of this failure: Othello and Desdemona’s marriage is destroyed; Othello goes mad from Iago’s insinuations and murders the naïve Desdemona; Roderigo, tricked into trying to kill Cassio, is then murdered by Iago; Emilia is murdered by Iago when she reveals his treachery; Othello commits suicide when he learns of Desdemona’s innocence; Iago himself is sentenced to torture and execution contrary to his plans for his future.

Othello’s fall from grace is stunning. At first he’s a happy newlywed; successful as a warrior and well respected in the community. When Brabantio accuses him of witchcraft in front of the Venetian senate, the members disbelieve the charges because of his stellar reputation. He faces them with calm and confidence. But Othello is corrupted and quickly becomes an irrational, despondent madman, an abusive husband, a murderer, and after realizing his colossal mistake, he kills himself (Tragic Hero)

"Downfall of the Moor"

Brabantio thinks of Othello as the Moorish soldier—a well-behaved barbarian—and will never accept him as a son-in-law. Iago's fixation on revenge rules him absolutely and drives him to ruin. Roderigo thinks he can buy Desdemona's love. Desdemona loves Othello and will continue to love him no matter how.

When Othello promotes Cassio over Iago, the ensign vows to get revenge; after Othello secretly marries Desdemona, Brabantio determines Othello is using witchcraft on his daughter; Desdemona defends her husband and her father decides to disown her; when the Turks send an armada against Venetian held Cyprus, the senate decides to send Othello to lead its defense; Cassio gets into a drunken brawl while he's in charge of the guard and Othello decides to demote him; Iago lies to Othello about Desdemona's unfaithfulness and the general decides to murder her. Although closure is illustrated in the story, it's the use of denial that dominates and leads the characters to their sad end. Once Iago sets upon a course of revenge he's relentless, and completely unwilling to let go of his grudge over losing the lieutenantcy. He destroys everyone around him, including himself. Once Othello's suspicions are aroused, he can't let the notion of Desdemona's unfaithfulness go. Desdemona's so much in love with Othello that when she sees his shocking change toward her, she can't accept that he doesn't love her anymore. She keeps trying to appease him and makes mistakes that worsen the situation.

Temptation

The characters bring enormous problems upon themselves by indulging in immediate gratification without thinking about the possible consequences. Othello is tempted by Desdemona's compassion and affection when she pursues him. He disregards any ramifications their engaging in a relationship may have; Desdemona is tempted by Othello's romantic life story, status, and courage, and eagerly elopes with him knowing her father will disapprove; Iago is tempted by the prestige of the rank of lieutenant and lies to get it; Roderigo is tempted by Iago's offer to help him win Desdemona and pays the man, making himself a pawn to Iago; Cassio is tempted by drink when he knows he's in charge of the guard, gets drunk and loses his rank; Emilia, although married, is tempted by other men.

Conscience

If the characters listened to their conscience, the tragic ending could have been avoided. Desdemona might have gone to Brabantio, declared her love for Othello, and faced her father's opposition instead of first sneaking off with the Moor. Roderigo should have gracefully acknowledged Desdemona's marriage and gone on with his life, but he plots with Iago to destroy her union with Othello. Cassio should have listened to his conscience and refused that first drink since he was on guard duty, but he lets Iago persuade him to "celebrate" with everyone else. His lapse of conscience allows him to be used to hurt the people he loves.

The characters deal with the effects of the story's problems which occur when "help" is used. Cassio helps Othello court Desdemona by acting as go-between before their marriage, and his kindness is used against him later; Brabantio hopes to save his daughter's reputation by rescuing her from

Othello on her wedding night, yet he only alienates Desdemona; Iago offers to help Roderigo steal Desdemona away from her husband; Iago gives advice to Cassio after his reputation is ruined. He suggests that Cassio ask Desdemona to influence Othello to reinstate him, causing conflict between husband and wife; Desdemona thinks she's helping Cassio by insisting that Othello reconcile with him immediately, but she is only implicating herself; Emilia tries to bolster Desdemona's spirits by telling her about the nature of men, advice Desdemona does not want nor need.

The objective characters attempt to approach the effects of the problem by using "hinder." Brabantio tries to undermine Desdemona's marriage by refusing to house her while Othello's at war with the Turks; Roderigo works to thwart Othello's marriage by luring Desdemona away from him with money and jewels; Emilia unknowingly hurts Desdemona's position with Othello by stealing her handkerchief and giving it to Iago.

Closure

Overall Story Catalyst (Shakespeare as Dramatist)

The use of closure accelerates the story. The Turkish fleet encounters a storm off of the coast of Cyprus and turns back, ending the threat of war. This makes Othello available to concentrate on his marriage, and frees Iago to execute his diabolical plot against Othello and Cassio. Brabantio's ending **his relationship with his daughter leaves her alone and dependent upon the will of her husband, thus, she has no place to turn when Othello changes toward her.** Othello's demand of **quick closure** to the situation fuels his need to have proof of his wife's affair. This compels Iago to use Emilia to steal Desdemona's handkerchief. It is planted in Cassio's room—Iago then arrange for Othello to believe he is overhearing Cassio making lewd remarks about Desdemona. Iago races to remove ties to his involvement in Othello's downfall. He convinces Roderigo to kill Cassio; kills Roderigo when he only wounds Cassio; tries to make Emilia shut up about the handkerchief, then kills her when she reveals the truth.

Brabantio is prejudiced against Othello as a son-in-law, feels Desdemona is making a mistake, and disowns her. Desdemona's unshakable love for Othello keeps her from realizing she's in real danger, until it's too late. Othello's blind trust in Iago keeps him from seeing his ensign's malice. Iago will never accept that Cassio will make a better lieutenant than he would. Emilia, having been trained to obey her husband, can't see that he's up to mischief with Desdemona's handkerchief until her mistress is murdered.

Memory

Overall Story Benchmark

The more the characters use "memory" the greater the problems become in the story. After Othello becomes suspicious of Desdemona, whenever he recalls his tender feelings for her the more enraged he becomes; memories of Desdemona's love tears Othello apart now that he believes he's lost it. Her betrayal of her father comes back to haunt Othello. Lodovico witnesses Othello slap his wife, remembers Othello as a kind and composed man, **and begins to believe the popular theory that all Moors are barbarians.** Emilia remembers Iago asking her to steal Desdemona's handkerchief,

recalls how she found it on the ground and gave it to him. Her recollections cause Iago to kill her for revealing the truth.

Additional Overall Story Information →

Main Character Throughline

Othello — Venetian General

Othello endeavors to prove or disprove his wife's infidelity. He listens to Iago's "evidence"; questions Desdemona about her missing handkerchief; eavesdrops on Cassio; interrogates Emilia about Desdemona's fidelity; judges and executes Desdemona.

Othello wants Desdemona, and by winning her he hopes to gain the acceptance of Venetian society at large. Terrified of losing her to a younger man, he seeks solid proof of her betrayal from Iago. In possessing that proof, the handkerchief in Cassio's mistress's hands, Othello is convinced that he has lost Desdemona's love, and he himself becomes lost.

At the beginning of the story, Othello is depicted as a selfless, moral man. He refuses to run and hide when he learns that Brabantio knows of his marriage to Desdemona and has armed men after him. He leaves his bride safe and undisturbed at the inn where they're staying, goes to the Senate, and faces Brabantio's charges bravely. When Brabantio accuses him of using witchcraft to seduce his daughter, Othello has his wife sent for. If she says she was bewitched, he'll accept any sentence, even execution. Although Desdemona's willing to sail with him to Cyprus, Othello leaves her under Iago's protection to bring her only when it's safe. Othello is willing to postpone his honeymoon to ensure her safety, even though she'll accompany him into a war zone.

Othello is so wounded by the thought of Desdemona's betrayal that he's blinded to everything except his own pain. Once he decides to end his torment by killing her, nothing Desdemona says can make him look beyond himself for the truth.

Main Character Thematic Conflict

Morality vs. Ability

In the conflict between "morality" and "self-interest," self-interest takes hold of the once moral man and destroys him. Othello is driven to torment Desdemona. He treats her like a whore because he believes she's **cuckolded** him with his own officer. He could stand anything but the loss of her love, and so having convinced himself that he has lost it, he can't listen to Desdemona's plea of innocence. Nor will he listen to Emilia when she tells him that Desdemona loves him and is faithful, until it's too late.

Othello is tempted by the beauty, position, and compassion that Desdemona can give him in marriage. He's an experienced man who should know that their differences may bring problems, but he ignores the possibility of trouble in his desire to possess Desdemona. Their differences, namely Othello's age and race, however, appear to linger in his mind, causing him some uneasiness. He's easily tempted to believe that Desdemona is unfaithful when Iago begins his torment. That Othello is so easily led by Iago's innuendoes and lies, not only causes problems, but leads to the death of four people.

If Othello had used his conscience he could have prevented the tragedy.

Othello focuses his attention on where he thinks the problem is, Desdemona's unfaithfulness. Brabantio warns Othello that "She has deceived her father, and may thee." (I,iii,318) Othello immediately answers, "My life upon her faith!" (I,iii,319) Indeed, her faith in him, demonstrated by their marriage, is extremely valuable to Othello. He has built his self-worth and future upon Desdemona's faith in him as a man, so when she's accused of breaking that faith, Othello is shattered.

Othello thinks that using disbelief will solve his problems regarding Desdemona. He refuses to believe anything she says in her defense. He won't believe Emilia when she swears Desdemona is faithful; disbelieves Desdemona's words of innocence when he first accuses her. He overlooks her devotion and innocence: she gave up her home and family for him and has had no opportunity to have "a thousand times committed" adultery with Cassio. In spite of all the evidence of Desdemona's devotion to him, Othello doubts her love, saying, "She is false as water." (V,ii,161)

If Othello had used the approach that made him a fair and noble man, he could have been successful in discovering Iago's deceit and keeping his marriage intact. Whereas Othello rationally solicits evidence from several people the night of the brawl, he's totally irrational when he considers Desdemona's alleged betrayal. He relies on only one "witness" without considering Iago's motives; ignores Emilia's assurances that Desdemona is a faithful wife; refuses to listen to Desdemona's pleas of innocence.

Main Character Critical Flaw

Othello's misuse of obligation makes the story a failure. Once he's convinced that Desdemona is unfaithful, Othello feels compelled to murder her. Othello's misplaced obligation to Iago, "A man. . . of honesty and trust." (I,iii,307) leads him to his destruction. When Iago tells Othello of Desdemona's "affair" with Cassio, he pledges his loyalty to Iago. "I am bound to thee for ever." (III,iii,243) In offering this contract to Iago instead of honoring the marital pledge to his wife, Othello makes a tragic mistake that costs him his honor, his wife, and his own life.

The more Othello thinks he understands the level of Desdemona's unfaithfulness the greater his jealousy and thirst for vengeance.

Main Character Description

Tall, dark-skinned man, part Berber, part Arab, in his early forties. Born of royal blood, but forced to endure slavery because of his race, he's risen to the rank of general and is greatly respected. But his standard of perfection for those around him, and his trusting nature leads him astray. He's destroyed by his own man.

Main Character Backstory

Born of royal blood, Othello is a Moor who was sold into slavery and has lived in army camps since he was seven. He became a professional soldier rising to the rank of general. He has fought many battles, skillfully leading his men and earning a reputation as a great, honorable, and level-headed warrior. Othello's traveled the world where he's encountered cannibals and a race of men whose

heads grow beneath their shoulders. He had only been in Venice for nine months where he was a frequent guest in Brabantio's home. He often recounted his adventures to entertain his host. During that time he fell in love with Brabantio's young daughter, Desdemona, who became "enchanted" by his life story. At forty, Othello has never been in love and he impulsively, perhaps for the first time in his life, seizes an opportunity without mapping out an advanced strategy first.

Othello Desdemona and Emilia

Women in the play Othello

- In Shakespearean time females were often treated and regarded in society as inferior to men
- Desdemona and Emilia both display some tendencies that resemble present day female attributes closer than attributes of the women of the Renaissance era.
- However both are not out of place in the play and do not differ too much from what we know of women's roles in the past.
- Can it be said that little has changed in our treatment of females in society today compared to their treatment back in Shakespeare's day?
- Shakespeare always tries to create characters that resemble real-life individuals and reflected lifestyles and personalities accurately.
- They are definitely women of their time
- BUT D+E are similar to females of the modern era
- If 'Othello' was set in modern era how would these women be different?
- The actions and decisions of the two female characters are integral to the events of the plot
- Both are highly believable and realistic
- Because Iago is such a fascinating character the role that Desdemona took in her own demise is sometimes overlooked!
- Des is primarily considered an innocent victim of her fate.
- She did not want to die at her husband's hands
- She was loving and devoted to Othello
- She envisioned a long marriage of prosperity and dedication that would lead to her ultimate happiness.
- She has achieved the epitome of a woman's role: she has found a husband she can love with all her being!!!
- How could she possibly have believed that anything she did or said would have caused her loving husband to turn on her so violently?
- Would she initiate anything that would lead to her own demise or end her relationship with Othello?
- ***Iago is intentionally responsible for characters death. He wished Othello to become jealous and to destroy him and his marriage***
- However are Othello and Desdemona to some extent also culpable?
- How could Othello not see through Iago and how could he not trust his wife's love?
- Othello has to be held culpable for his actions
- Desdemona is also somewhat culpable because she was so devoted to her husband's love
- Desdemona acted as an enabler in her marriage and allowed her death at Othello's hands to happen!!!

•

Kathleen Chada outside Dublin Central Criminal Court today after her husband Sanjeev Chadea was jailed for life for murdering their two sons. Photograph: Collins.

Sanjeev Chada in a family photograph. Photograph: PA Wire

Ten-year-old Eoghan Chada (left) and his brother Ruairi (5). Photograph: Family handout photo/Garda

Kathleen Chada with family and friends as they leave Dublin Central Criminal Court today. Her husband Sanjeev was jailed for life for murdering their two sons. Photograph: Collins.

[Previous Image](#) [Next Image](#)

[Previous Images](#) [More Images](#)

Mark Hilliard

Topics:

[News](#)

[Crime & Law](#)

[Central Criminal Court](#)

[Sanjeev Chada](#)

Tue, Oct 7, 2014, 18:10

First published: Tue, Oct 7, 2014, 15:15

[More Sharing Services](#)

A 44-year old man has admitted to the murder of his two sons last year.

In the Central Criminal Court today, Sanjeev Chada of Ballinkillen, Bagenalstown, Co Carlow pleaded guilty to killing Eoghan (10) and Ruairi Chada (5) at Skehanagh Lower, Ballintubber, Co Mayo on July 29th, 2013.

Their bodies were discovered in the boot of Chada's car, which he had crashed not far from Westport.

Kathleen Chada: 'I thought we were an ordinary family'

Kathleen Chada victim impact statement: 'I don't ask why anymore...just how?'

Trial date set for father charged with murdering sons

A nationwide alert had previously been issued to help locate the boys.

Mr Justice Paul Carney imposed two life sentences to run concurrently.

In an hour-long hearing, the court heard Chada had decided to kill his children to spare them the shame of his fraudulent behaviour - he had embezzled €56,000 from a community centre to pay debts from online trading.

On Sunday, July 28th, he told his wife Kathleen he was taking Eoghan and Ruairi bowling.

However, he then drove to Mayo where he strangled the boys. He tried to strangle himself at the same time but failed in his attempt.

He placed the boys' bodies in the boot of his car and later crashed into a wall.

A "child rescue Ireland" alert had been issued by gardaí after his wife became concerned for their welfare.

In her victim impact statement to the court, Ms Chada said she met her husband 18 years ago and they had married just over six years later.

"I thought we had a normal family blessed to have two healthy boys," she said.

"How can evil such as this be hidden for so long in a seemingly normal father?"

She said the day of her sons' death had appeared normal. However, the court heard Chada had planned the murders in the preceding days.

"Little did I know Sanj intended I never see any of them alive again. I question why he left me behind."

Giving evidence, Det Sgt Gary Walsh said Chada had considered killing his wife too but felt she may have proven too strong.

The older boy, Eoghan, died of ligature strangulation and blunt force trauma to the head. Ruairi died of ligature strangulation.

Chada wrote a number of notes he intended to leave behind, describing Eoghan as a "magician" and Ruairi as a "treasure".

"I suppose we will always be together now in some way," he wrote, asking that the three be buried together.

In a statement to the court he said he was truly sorry, especially to his wife, but offered little in mitigating evidence.

Dressed in dark grey, Chada spoke very quietly only to plead guilty to two counts of murder. His gaze never lifted from the floor.

Since the deaths, he has remained in custody at the Central Mental Hospital where he has displayed suicidal ideation.

Tue, Oct 7, 2014, 18:10

Desdemona's timeline

How is Desdemona seen in the early stages of the play?

Spoken of in line 70 of act I and we her rebellious nature straght away

Speaks only 27 lines in opening Act and is only seen in one of the Acts

Her father describes her as a maid 'tender, fair and happy'.

Contrast of her character

She is strong, insistent and makes an impassioned plea to the Duke to be allowed to accompany Othello to Cyprus.

We meet a spirited young woman who knows her own mind and who is very much in love.

We next meet her in Cyprus .

Again she is composed as she awaits Othello arrival.

She engages with Iago humourly

When Othello arrives all is harmonious; they are playful and loving towards one another.

Ignorant of Iago's plot she takes up Cassio's cause with her characteristic passion and zeal, an indication that her actions are motivated by sympathy and kindness.

She flirts with Othello a little, chides him a little and then laughs at him or cajoles him, to try to get him to do what she wants: to persuade him to recall Cassio.

It is lovely romantic banter and comes just before Iago plants the seeds of doubt about Desdemona in Othello's mind.

When Othello starts to behave irrationally toward her, she remains loyal, always trying to work out what is causing his behaviour.

She wonders if she is to blame but never once points the finger at him.

Climax reached when he calls her a whore. She is left reeling from this but is always constant to him. To Othello's outburst she appears numbed

Emelia tries to give her guidance but to no avail
While alone with Othello at the end is eerie calm
frightens her, yet she's still searching for an
answer, hoping that their love will win out.
Her hopes are futile and he smothers her to death
As she dies her final words are ones of complete
forgiveness

Sent from my iPad

_____ The information contained in this e-mail and any attachments is confidential and may be the subject of legal, professional or other privilege. It is intended only for the named addressee(s) and may not be disclosed to anyone else without the consent of the sender. If you are not a named addressee you must not retain, use, disclose, copy, print or rely on the contents of this e-mail and

should delete all copies of it from your systems immediately. Any views, opinions or advice contained in this e-mail are those of the sending individual and not necessarily those of the College. It is possible for data transmitted by e-mail to be deliberately or accidentally corrupted or intercepted. For this reason where the communication is by e-mail Terenure College does not accept any responsibility for any breach of confidence which may arise from the use of this medium.

Emilia

Iago's wife is an attractive young woman

Unhappily married to him

Full of worldly wisdom and has an incurious tolerant approach to life.

She has a very poor opinion of the male sex. (Iago inspired!!)

Her easy going nature blinds her to blacker depths of Iago's nature

On men: 'they are all but stomachs, and we all but food; they eat us hungrily, and when they are full they belch us'

She has had experience of jealous behaviour and plainly warns

Desdemona of Othello's potential jealousy

Emilia could have stopped Iago in his tracks before it was too late but she fails to grasp it.

Read Act IV.ii and discuss

W.B. YEATS

Yeats lived in a time of extraordinary change and his poetry explores a powerful series of tensions between youth and age, order and chaos. He explores conflicts, both at a personal and national level, in a direct and compelling manner. He was a man, as Seamus Heaney described, never simply 'content to live', who spoke with an authoritative voice and a commanding tone. His poetry is full of questions, revealing a man who was sensitive to the world around him, voicing criticism, anger, admiration, nostalgia, advice and opinion. He encountered his world with intellectual vigour while always remaining true to his heart.

Political conflict

Yeats was frequently disillusioned with Ireland, as is apparent in September 1913. Yeats protests furiously at the materialistic and vulgar values of the merchant classes, in contrast with the heroism and idealism of the patriots of the past. The events which inspired this poem were the failure to raise money for an art gallery to house the Hugh Lane collection and the Lockout in 1913 of the workers by the employers led by W.M. Murphy, one of the captains of Irish industry. The polar opposites of the poem are O'Leary (one of the founder members of the Fenians and friend of Yeats) and the Catholic Nationalists. To Yeats, the latter were more concerned with the acquisition of personal wealth than with the establishment of a nation. Yeats was disappointed that a group who were taking the lead economically could not do so culturally. He scorns and satirizes the middle-class piety and the philistine culture of Ireland; September 1913, that has 'dried the marrow from the bone'. O'Leary, the dignified patriot, represents the perfect blend of courage and learning. He placed prime importance on the cultural life of the nation and had a strong appreciation of art and culture yet was physically daring, sacrificing himself for his country. Yeats' opinion however, was to change. These very people, derided for their lack of passion had now 'resigned' their part 'In the casual comedy' and had 'changed utterly'. Easter 1916 recognises that heroic, self sacrificing patriotism was not dead. (quote) It is not however a single-minded celebration of what the leaders of The Rising had done. This event, though heroic was also tragic. It was, in Yeats' eyes, the birth of a 'terrible beauty' achieved at the expense of life. This haunting juxtaposition highlights Yeats' conflicting and paradoxical responses to this event. The rhetorical questions of the final stanza reveal the poet's uncertainties about the process of revolution. Yeats was not in favour of militant behaviour but had always desired that Ireland be self-governed and seeing the Irish population rouse themselves and resign their part in the 'casual comedy' gave him cause to sympathise and honour their heroism.

Conflict between youth and old age.

Yeats often became melancholic as a result of his awareness of the brevity of life. This is clearly evident in his doleful reflection in *The Wild Swans at Colle*. His heart is 'sore' as he observes these 'brilliant creatures,' which function as a symbol for the poet. They represent his youth which is now long behind him. He states passively that

'The nineteenth autumn has come upon me', the years weighing heavily upon him, in contrast to the swans which are active and powerful, they 'mount' and 'scatter', rising from the lake to wheel above him 'in great broken rings.'. Yeats observes something timeless in the swans and sees the permanent presence of beauty that they embody. They symbolise that which is eternal for Yeats in contrast to the autumnal surroundings to which Yeats feels inextricably linked.

Sailing to Byzantium is another poem dealing with the issues of growing old in a changed world. Yeats feels no part of this vibrant country, a 'country for old men'. The opening stanza presents a dramatic affirmation of youth where the young are in 'one another's arms' mesmerised by the 'sensual music' of love. There are conflicting claims presented between the younger generations who live in a sensual world and the more sedate singing of the old scarecrow, reincarnated into the eternal art form of the golden bird. The movement from scarecrow to golden bird represents the central theme of Sailing to Byzantium, escaping the imperfect physical, sensual world to the ideal world of art. The bird has transcended the decay and infirmities of the transitory world; it may claim to be superior to the 'Fish, flesh, or fowl,' who have been 'begotten, born' but must also die. The poem gathers its tension through the dramatic conflict between passion and wisdom. However though wisdom conquers, its victory is almost Pyrrhic (victory gained at too great a cost). The poet has sailed to Byzantium, but his heart, 'sick with desire', is full of Ireland and he cannot speak of the natural world without celebrating it. Yeats opts for the rather cold mechanical song of the golden bird but it doesn't quite match the passionate, vibrant music of the young. The richness of nature is so powerfully evoked in the first stanza that, by contrast, the world of art described in the last stanza, seems tame, cold and uninspiring. As Ellmann suggests 'such a fate could only satisfy Yeats momentarily. Having sailed to Byzantium, he was ready to re-embark.' (From the Man and the Mask.) Yeats had pursued wisdom and that pursuit had changed everything. Returning from his voyage he would find a 'new intensity' in 'all visible and tangible things'. Ibid. Yeats himself regarded this as a bitter poem but Eavan Boland argues that it is 'an immortal fury against the tragedy of decay and the inevitability of death'. In a letter to his friend Olivia Shakespeare he wrote, 'I am tired and in a rage at being old. I am all I ever was and much more but an enemy has bound me and twisted me so I can plan and think as I never could but no longer achieve all I plan and think.' But Yeats' 'pugnacious thrust never deserted him'. (Heaney, Finders Keepers) so much so, at the age of 74, 'here at life's end' he prays for 'an old man's frenzy,' He courageously wished to 'remake' himself. His 'old man's eagle mind' still wishing to 'pierce the clouds'. An Acre of Grass.

Conflict between order and chaos

Another major and significant conflict in Yeats' work is between order and chaos. Yeats admired the aristocratic tradition of 18th century Ireland. The world of the Great House was aligned to his own sense of identity. He felt very much at home in Lady Gregory's house at Coole. As Heaney points out, he was a 'mythologizer of aristocratic ceremony and grace' ibid. Yeats believed the Anglo Irish Ascendancy had a duty to set an example of gracious and cultured living. This is evident in his elegy for Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz. The graceful living of Lissadell is beautifully evoked in the opening images: 'The light of evening, Lissadell, /Great windows open to the south, /two girls in silk kimonos, both/Beautiful, one gazelle.' Yeats creates an elegant and graceful picture here. The transition from the refined,

elegant youth of the girls to their turbulent adult lives is graphically portrayed, as a 'raving autumn[which] shears/Blossom from the summer's wreath;' Autumn is personified as a violent reaper, stripping away the youthful beauty of the girls. Their political activism as much as the passing years are responsible for their 'withered old and skeleton gaunt' appearance. The poem laments the passing of such an ideal world in the woman's futile attempt to find 'Some vague Utopia'! (Yeats at his arrogant best!). The 'conflagration' at the end of the poem points to the destruction of the traditional values that were cradled in places such as Lissadell.

Chaos, the birth of 'Mere anarchy' is graphically depicted in Yeats' masterpiece *The Second Coming*. It is a stark, terrifying and prophetic vision of a disintegrating social order with burgeoning evil born and 'loosed upon the world'. Images of the 'blood-dimmed tide' and the 'rough beast' slouching 'towards Bethlehem' show how troubled the poet is by the increasing violence and annihilation of cultural and aristocratic values. This poem is situated in the midst of great historical upheaval; World War I, the Russian Revolution, the collapse of the great Empires, the Irish War of Independence and the uprooting of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. In his major prose work entitled *A Vision*, Yeats outlines his theory of history. He believed that each major historical period, lasting approximately two thousand years, would be overthrown by some massive upheaval. He is predicting the violent, cataclysmic end of the Christian era. The collapse of civilization is dramatically conveyed in the active, force-filled words of the opening stanza. The 'gyre' is spinning chaotically out of control. The 'falcon', metaphorically representing Christian civilization, has lost contact with the essence of Christ's teachings, 'the falconer'. Very soon 'the blood – dimmed tide' will engulf the world in a wave of anarchy. The terrible desert beast, the antithesis of innocence, represents the violent, apocalyptic events that will end the Christian era in a cataclysmic wave of violence and devastation. This poem presents a nihilistic vision of a world without justice, reason and order. It is a frightening prospect and still today a realistic one.

Yeats did attempt to resolve some conflicts in his poems but in many cases he had to accept that such a synthesis was not always possible let alone probable. He did remain in contact with the world, however imperfect it seemed, and encountered it with his complex temperament that could whisper of grace, youth and beauty or clamour against injustice, old-age and decay. Perhaps we should be grateful that many conflicts were never resolved, for it was they that evoked his most difficult struggles and his most poignant poetry, granting him 'an old man's frenzy'.

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy's poetry is both lyrically beautiful and deeply reflective. Though written in the early 20th century still speaks to us today. His voice is deeply personal, musical, and concentrated; his insights are visionary, bleak and honest; his presentation is simple, economical and unassuming, leaving a memorable imprint not only in his century but also ours.

Just as we question the ethics of war today, so too in the midst of the Boer War of 1899 to 1902 and the Great War of 1914 to 1918 did Hardy. His criticisms are not overt but subtle, restrained and economical. The Drummer Hodge reflects the tragedy and waste of war. It implies that Hodge's sacrifice was unnecessary, futile. The Drummer was generally the youngest of soldiers, too young for battle and the word Hodge reflects his simply county background. This yokel, this West Country boy has fallen far away from home. The strangeness of the terrain in which he is most unceremoniously laid to rest is reflected in the Afrikaans place names used in the poem. The 'kopje-crest/That breaks the veldt' is his final resting place. Hardy's simple and natural language are easily accessible. His direct and monosyllabic opening immediately engages his audience. 'They throw in Drummer Hodge' conveys with clarity what befalls the young soldier. His body is thrown not lowered into its grave. There is no respect shown, no dignity honoured, no military honours bestowed. He is 'Uncoffined'. No attention is paid to funeral rites. Hardy's subtle criticism of futility is clearly evident here.

The contrast between this simple English country boy and his remote and alien resting place is further developed in stanza two. He was unable to grasp the meaning of 'the broad Karoo, /The Bush, the dusty loam.' The 'foreign constellations' that shine above Drummer Hodge are a motif in the poem, linking the three short stanzas and underlying how far away from home this young boy is. These 'strange-eyed constellations' finally become his own. Hardy's quiet, reserved tone accentuates the pathos of Hodge's fate. Like many young teenagers today, this young teenager, this innocent youth, has died a premature death, in a foreign land, fighting a battle which means little or nothing to him. The destructive nature of war and its needless slaughter are economically yet powerfully evoked in this poem and its message is as clear today as it was a century previous.

The Darkling Thrush reflects the heaviness Hardy felt writing at and reflecting on the dawn of a new century. When first published the poem was titled 'By the Century's Deathbed'. The first two stanzas paint a bleak landscape where everything is depressing and desolate. The winter's day is drawing to an end; the light is 'weakening'. The year too is ending, the 'Winter's dregs' are all that remain. The century is also on its 'Deathbed'. There is an overwhelming tone of sadness and

sorrow at the passing of time. Hardy feels a close affinity with the countryside; both are desolate and lonely as 'all mankind/ Had sought their household fires'. Everything is disintegrating and dying. A new era of science and industry was fast approaching and the great Romantic era was over. This 'ancient pulse of germ and birth' in this December month has lost its power to rejuvenate. It is 'shrunk hard and dry'. These two stanzas paint a most hopeless picture.

There is a significant change in the third stanza. The words 'At once' create a new voice. The lifeless, dying countryside hasn't changed but the 'voice...among /The bleak twigs' fills 'the growing gloom' with its 'full-hearted evensong'. Hardy is taken aback by this intrusion into his meditation. He cannot see any cause for such a 'full hearted' song, such 'ecstatic sound'. This thrush, like the landscape, is 'aged...frail, gaunt and small' but the poet detects a note of 'blessed Hope' in its song. Why has Hardy capitalized 'Hope'? Is there perhaps some religious significance here, something the bird knew of but of which Hardy was 'unaware'? The optimistic note sung by the thrush does not lift Hardy's bleak outlook at the close of the century.

The general optimism of the early 20th century was most significantly etched in the magnificent feat that was the SS Titanic. On the 15th of April 1912 the ultimate symbol of man's 'Pride' and 'vanity' sank with the loss 1,513 lives. The Convergence of the Twain is Hardy's response to this disaster. It was written for a public event organized to raise funds for the families affected. This poem moves away from the more personal tone associated with Hardy's work to a more formal tone, appropriate to a public event. However it very subtly shouts out Hardy's belief that there is no escaping the wrath of nature and mocks those who think otherwise. A biblical echo can be heard as the 'Jewels..... designed to ravish the sensuous mind lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind' at the bottom of the ocean. Everything is vanities of vanity! The 'unsinkable' Titanic now lies 'in a solitude of seas'. This arrogant, over-confident spirit of the age was tamed by the force of nature, 'a sinister mate' that was 'Prepared... for her... a Shape of Ice'. Predestination, fate, a common theme in much of Hardy's work is evident here. Hardy outlines the inevitable 'convergence' of the iceberg and the ship. 'They were bent by paths coincident on being anon twin halves of one august event'. It was a journey predestined by 'The Immanent Will', and is a reflection on human vanity rather than human suffering.

At the age of 77 Hardy reflects on his own passing. The poem Afterwards evokes a beautiful sense of time passing and reflects on Hardy's love of nature. The transitory nature of life or Hardy's 'stay' on earth is reflected in the adjective 'tremulous' which heightens the fragility, uncertainty and brevity of human nature. The subtle beauty of the natural world is suggested in the gentle assonance and alliteration in the second line of the poem as the 'May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings'. Hardy ponders on his death and wonders how he will be remembered. It is interesting to note that literary fame is not what is attractive to him. He wishes to be remembered with fondness by those who knew him. Hardy has a remarkable detachment to death and an acceptance of its inevitability. He wishes to be remembered simply as a man who 'noticed' and was 'familiar' with nature. A modest man, who wished to protect innocent creatures 'But he could do little for them'. Hardy poses various questions during the course of this poem and wonders if

he will be remembered after bell of 'quittance is heard in the gloom'. This bleak outlook on life is offset by Hardy's love of nature. He belonged to nature and it was enough to be remembered by those who understood this too.

Hardy's poetry reflects themes and issues which still concern us today. He too lived and wrote at the turn of a century with its boundless confidence and optimism. Hardy, however, like many artists of the time did not share this view. He criticises the destructive nature of war and its needless slaughter, reflects on a changing world, criticises the vanity and arrogance of a world that thought it invincible and meditates on the past and his own passing. He is most definitely a poet of our time!

Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath was born in 1932 in Boston, Massachusetts and died a brief thirty years later in 1963. Her Journals which she began writing in 1950 open with a quotation from the poet W. B. Yeats. He states: 'we only begin to live when we conceive life as a tragedy' It is true to say of Plath that in her short thirty years she certainly lived and produced a volume of work which only gained the respect it deserved posthumously. For her life was always 'shifting, flowing, melting.like quicksand... hopeless from the start.' *The Journals*. Many people find the work of Plath depressing. Certainly she herself was prevalent to extraordinary mood swings, she contemplated and attempted suicide, she underwent electroconvulsive therapy, she had psychiatric help, she most certainly was depressed many times in her life. But what is fascinating about her work is as Ted Hughes said in his Forward to *The Journals* (1982) is that 'Her real self showed in her writing....When a real self finds language and manages to speak, surely it is a dazzling event.' Hughes continues 'It is important to distinguish between a work that is trying to reach an artistic form using a real event as its basis and a documentary of some event that did happen.' Plath basis her work on real events but takes us on incredible imaginative journey. Like the poet Emily Dickinson her poems are mindscapes which present a rich tapestry of pain and suffering. Her poems reflect the intensity of despair and one can only admire a genius who stays and understands.

Plath was most concerned with her identity as a writer. She lived in a time when there were significant curtailments imposed by society on women. There were particular expectations of the role of women in the 1950's. The world of poet and motherhood were as Eavan Boland was to suggest 'almost magnetically opposed' (*Object Lessons*). Yet Plath

Longed for both. It was a novelty in the 60's to write about pregnancy and birth. Plath did and did so in a most exciting, delicate voice.

Morning Song is a perfect example of her struggle to fuse the two. The mother's life is shadowed by the child's arrival. She is aware of the repetitive nature of looking kids and finds herself standing 'round blankly as walls.' However she is soon enriched by the joy of love as 'All night' she listens to its 'moth breath' as it 'Flickers among the flat pink roses.' And with 'One cry' she 'stumble(s) from bed, cow heavy' to respond. There is a striking difference between the immobility of the parents in stanza two and the warm domestic reality of stanza five.

Her poem ***Child*** also reflects the simple pleasures she derives from her child. His 'clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing' that she longs to fill with the beauty of the world. At the same time she feels an underlying threat to the child's safety and this distresses her.

Like most poets Plath struggles at times to find inspiration and searches for poetic vision. Her despondency at the lack of inspiration is expressed in ***Black Rook in Rainy Weather***. The poet is surrounded by wintry bleakness and paints a psychic landscape for her audience. There is a strong association between poet's mood and the scene evoked. She desires 'some backtalk/From the mute sky'. A quiet longing is felt here, a longing for the miracle that will transform this bleakness into something radiant. That miracle is the creative impulse, that spark of the imagination that will change the ordinary into the extraordinary. Her despondent mood is lifted as she sees that 'spasmodic /Tricks of radiance' which can be called miracles occur. And she awaits once again 'that rare, random descent.'

An intense interest in what appears on the surface and what is hidden underneath fascinated Plath. In her poem ***Mirror*** the depths hide something frightening and sinister, something to be avoided but which

one cannot escape. Her mirror is a mirror in which each reader sees his or her own concerns reflected. For Plath it is a mirror belonging to a woman whose soul is troubled and tortured, as 'Faces and darkness separate us over and over.' Her dual identity as poet and mother are reflected in this poem. She tries to come to terms with the social pressures to reconcile the competing of artistic and domestic life. She feels her younger self is 'drowned'. She is caught between past and future. Something frightening, dark, terrible and true 'Rises toward her day after day'. Does this represent her fear of growing old? Or perhaps it is her fear of her troubled, divided self.

The apparent calm of the mirror as it 'simply meditates the opposite wall', is reflected in the opening stanzas of her masterpiece *Elm*. Yet again the hidden terrors surface as she talks. Plath's language is remarkably simple and direct. However her imagery in this poem is richly evocative. We are taken on a journey deep into the subconscious. Plath said of this poem that it contained 'the stigma of selfhood.' Colour is important and symbolic in her work and we see shadings of her most prevalent colours here. The sinister elements of **black** are prevalent in *Elm*, it knows 'the bottom' with its 'great tap root', it feels the shadowy presence of love which escapes it into the night. She is 'terrified by the dark thing / That sleeps in (her)'. The colour black elucidates her anger, depression and fear of destruction, of annihilation. **White** too is symbolically sinister. The 'merciless' moon represents coldness, it is associated with fertility but is 'barren', it cannot create life. There is a surreal, hallucinatory quality to her imagery and symbolism in this poem. The poem begins with the Elm as narrator addressing the poet. Both are compelled to explore great depths. The absence of love haunts the poet and as the poem progresses the Elm taunts her about this. As we move into the sixth tercet the Elm speaks for the poet. My red filaments burn

and stand a hand of wires.’ At this stage the distinction between the ‘you’ of the poem and the Elm become blurred. The external violence creates inner turmoil. Both Elm and poet are ‘inhabited by a cry.’ A cry that nightly ‘laps out / Looking with its hooks for something to love.’ Expressed here are the most open and intense feelings, which originate from the deepest self. This ‘dark thing’, this internal malignancy, conjures a silent inward terror. *Elm* is a richly textured poem, designed to evoke an understanding of the despair and frustration felt as a result of the loss of love, and the stigma of selfhood, that awful fear of being oneself, of being imbued with those ‘slow faults / That kill, that kill, that kill.’

Plath’s landscapes and seascapes are mostly a backdrop to the mood of the poet. What fascinates me about her poem *Finisterre* is the final stanza which paints a perfect picture postcard of the westernmost tip of Brittany. If you or I were to visit this tourist resort we would see the eclectic mixture of stalls selling postcards, trinkets, and pancakes, a myriad of colours bustling with the energy of any tourist resort. But not Plath. In contrast to the last stanza the first three are dark. The ‘black / Admonitory cliffs’ are ‘knuckled and rheumatic’. Her vista is bleak and desolate. The waves are ‘whitened by the faces of the drowned.’ The sea is a pounding force ‘exploding’ around her. It is a bottomless void. The mist holds the ‘Souls’ of the dead and as she walks ‘among them’ she feels herself almost suffocated as they stuff her ‘mouth with cotton.’ When she walks free she is ‘beaded with tears.’ This poem is a powerful and startling psychic landscape.

Martin Booth says that Plath’s poetry ‘has a beautiful weirdness to it, an inviting malevolence, that the world is dark.... And it seeks to set a mood as much as tell you something concrete.’ This is what makes her poetry fascinating. Plath’s world is undoubtedly dark. At times it is ‘only temporary’ *Arrival of the Bee Box* but finally it became an overwhelming ‘ceiling without a star’.

Mary Carroll

ROBERT FROST

‘You don’t want to say directly what you can say indirectly’

When working on any poetry question always-

1. Rephrase the question, and then decide on your position.
2. Plan -- decide on poems to suit answer and relevant quotations

Each paragraph must develop the question asked. Your conclusion should relate to the position you have taken, focusing on the question asked.

Frost’s poems are “little voyages of discovery”. Discuss with relation to the poems of Frost on your course.

Par 1. World of Frost’s poems.

- a. Nature, trees soil, crops, plants, insects, seasons.
- b. Local, familiar landscape.
- c. Frost is a man of nature, in communion with his environment.
He invites his listener into his world—fields, orchards, saw mills, woods.
- d. Delicate and finally balanced relationship with nature.
- e. Notice his simplicity in bringing alive these places.

Par 2. Notice the interdependence within nature, e.g. Tuft of Flowers. Here man appears as a destructive force with ‘a blade so keen’ that ‘leveled’ the scene. The butterfly lost its source of nutrition but soon discovers another tuft of flowers ‘beside a reedy brook’. The scythe ironically discovered this. This poem suggests the continuity of life and the capacity for survival and regeneration. The end of the poem shows that a link has been established between the poet and the butterflies. They speak to him,

communicating with him on a spiritual level, allowing him to reach out in space and time to touch the thoughts of the absent labourer.

- Par 3. In this section look at the darkness, despair and isolation expressed in nature. Design portrays a macabre picture of a 'fat and white' spider and the 'white heal all', carrying a 'moth/ Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth'. This shows the exactness with which Frost can depict nature's creatures. From this deadly, pale procession, the poet reflects that the driving force behind the scene of such cruelty is 'the design of darkness'.
- Par 4. This paragraph should focus on Frost's own journeys of discovery. Frost had an innate sense of isolation, a powerful feeling of loneliness and despair. Thus can be seen in his poem associated with the city, *Acquainted With The Night*. There is a distinct lack of community in his work. Even though the poem is set in the city and is populated with people in their apartments and the night watchman on duty, there is no communication, no communion between people. It is a place where people drop their 'eyes', unwilling to engage, abandoning themselves to insular and isolated lives, where the interrupted cry came 'not to call me back or say goodbye' but only to heighten and intensify the sense of aloneness. This is clearly exemplified as he out walks 'the furthest city lights'. It is not hard to empathize with Frost, as many of us have faced the harsh realities of life, the pain and despair, the loss and isolation. Is it true that all of us at one time or another have been acquainted with the night?
- Par. 5 In the poem 'Out, Out...' Frost alludes to Macbeth's speech after Lady Macbeth had killed herself. Here Macbeth is reflecting on the brevity of life. Frost relates this to the young life of a boy in Vermont, snuffed out before its time. Frost vividly paints the picture of the yard where the boy is working. We smell the 'sweet-scented' wood and hear the saw 'snarl and rattle'. Frost's use of onomatopoeia brings the yard alive before us, so much so that

when the saw strikes its fatal blow, we with the boy 'saw all'....'all spoiled'. We sit at the boy's bedside as he struggle to hold onto to life but that was not to be and with three short words we see and hear the passing away of this young boy, 'little—less - -nothing'. We make the grief filled journey with this family and understand why they must move on and turn to their affairs.

In After Apple –Picking and Birches we journey with Frost's imagination into higher visionary states. The 'essence of winter sleep is on the night' and the 'scent of apples' is in the air as frost lifted down and cherished in hand 'the great harvest' of the 'overtired' labourer. These moments of intensity cannot be sustained, the imagination must return down the ladder and take its 'long sleep'.

- Par 7. According to Frost a poem 'begins in delight and ends in wisdom'.
It is 'like a piece of ice on a hot stove' which 'must ride on its own melting'.
- Par 8. Conclusion: Frost's first person narratives give us an insight, a glimpse into the speaker's life at a specific moment. We journey through events and actions. Some idyllic as in After Apple – Picking or some harrowing as in 'Out, Out...' but all lead us to a dramatic conclusion and often provide an insight into life, a path to something else, rather than an end in itself.

Mary Carroll

+

Robert Frost Modernist/Traditionalist

Though his work is principally associated with the life and landscape of New England—and though he was a poet of traditional verse forms and metrics who remained steadfastly aloof from the poetic movements and fashions of his time—Frost is anything but merely a regional poet. The author of searching and often dark meditations on universal themes, he is a quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken, in the psychological complexity of his portraits, and in the degree to which his work is infused with layers of ambiguity and irony.

In a 1970 review of *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, the poet Daniel Hoffman describes Frost's early work as "the Puritan ethic turned astonishingly lyrical and enabled to say out loud the sources of its own delight in the world," and comments on Frost's career as the "American Bard": "He became a national celebrity, our nearly official poet laureate, and a great performer in the tradition of that earlier master of the literary vernacular, Mark Twain."

About Frost, President John F. Kennedy, at whose inauguration the poet delivered a poem, said, "He has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever gain joy and understanding."

-John Donne

Donne (1572-1631) is a remarkable, experimental and daring poet. He belongs to the Metaphysical group of poets whose work is taken up with ingenious arguments, unconventional imagery and powerful language. His poetry assails his audience with fascinating wit and intensity that is as fascinating today as it was four hundred years ago.

The language and themes of Metaphysical poetry are dramatic and complex. They draw their themes from the world of natural science, astronomy, philosophy and theology. Their poems are exercises in logical argument which demand a real alertness from their readers. The sophisticated paradox in ***Batter my Heart...*** pushes language to its limits. Donne address God, asking to be 'imprisoned' because 'I /unless you enthrall me, never shall be free/ Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.' This violent language is as startling today as it was in the 17th century. The dramatic and unconventional use of sexual imagery, to 'ravish' ironically in order to purify, is typical of the Metaphysical school of poets. Samuel Johnson suggested that Metaphysical poetry at its worst was 'heterogeneous (dissimilar) ideasyoked by violence together.' Donne has often been labelled with this criticism, however Metaphysical poetry has also been referred to as a muscular and exciting body of work and this is clearly evident in his poetry.

Typical of Metaphysical poetry, the openings of Donne's poems are immediate, arresting and often startling. ***The Sun Rising*** is a perfect example of this. Written in the format of an aubade, one expects a reverent address to the sun, honouring it as a source of light and life. However in a very dramatic statement Donne irreverently mocks and derides the sun: 'Busy old fool, unruly sun'. He launches a dismissive and insulting attack on this 'Saucy pedantic wretch'. The opening line of ***The Flea*** is similarly dramatic. It is as if we are in the middle of a sermon, being admonished by a preacher to 'mark but this.....and mark in this'. This however is no place for a preacher as Donne cunningly sets about seducing his lover!

Donne's consistent wit implies a quickness of intellect. It surprises and startles its audience with unexpected ideas, logical argument and remarkable comparisons. ***The Flea*** is a daring exercise in creative wit! Poems about fleas were popular in the 16th and 17th century and were usually of a bawdy and humorous nature. Donne's treatment of this genre is certainly original. He presents a series of ingenious, outlandish arguments with the sole purpose of enabling his lover overcome her reluctance to his sexual advances.

His first argument is based on the premise that the flea has sucked both their blood which has now mingled with that of the fleas. Donne would like to enjoy the same physical union with his beloved. He suggests that it is very 'little' that he asks of her. He envies the flea that has enjoyed her even before 'it woo'.

His second argument is outlandish yet ingenious. The woman is about to kill the flea. He pleads with her to save its life arguing that because of the mingling of bloods the flea is 'you and I.' , and so by killing the flea she will be guilty of three major offences. She will commit murder, killing the poet: suicide, 'self-murder'; and 'sacrilege' as the flea is now the sacred 'marriage temple' of lover and beloved!

His argument is unsuccessful; his beloved has triumphantly disproved his theory. He notes that she 'Find'st not thyself, nor me the weaker now,'! However Donne, the master of rebut cleverly shifts his argument and agrees that just as neither he nor she suffered from the death of the flea, she will not lose her honour' if she 'yield'st' to him'. Donne's emotional and intellectual intensity is clearly evident here. *The flea* is a love poem, though not in the traditional sense. It engages the reader with its humorous conceit. Rather than romanticising his beloved he respects and engages her intellect.

Conceit is at the heart of Metaphysical poetry and the most famous of all conceits is developed in his tender love poem *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*. Donne wishes to comfort his wife as he embarks on a long journey. Their grief is great and he desires to assure that they will be able to overcome this sadness. He concentrates on the spiritual aspect of their love in this poem and in the final three stanzas suggests that their souls 'As stiff twin compasses are two'. Using mathematical imagery he compares her soul to 'the fixed foot' which does not move 'but doth if the other do.' There is a strong inter-dependency between the two. When 'the other far doth roam' the fixed foot 'leans and hearkens after it.' The lovers remain linked. The outer leg of the compass 'obliquely' runs and 'makes me end, where I begun.' making a full circle, reuniting the lovers when his journey is done.

The tender tone of *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* is echoed in the opening lines of *The Dream*. Once again we are invited into the intimacy of the lover's bed. It is a very surreal moment as the poet awakens or is awoken from an erotic dream. He wishes to continue the emotional intensity, making it a reality! Although the tone is similar to *A Valediction...* the dramatic content is comparable to *The Flea*. Donne wishes to enjoy making love to his beloved. He believes she woke him deliberately so that he would not 'dream all' his 'dream'. And so she enters his arms and they 'act the rest'. This however is not the full story and like *The Flea* we feel some Donne's unease. An element of doubt and disappointment arises in the third stanza as the poet, now alone, is fully awake. He is uncertain about his lover's intentions and feelings. He searches for reassurance at the end of the poem and once again his imagery has a strong sexual innuendo. The image is based on the theory that a used torch flares up more easily than a new one. She quenches his 'torch' so that he will be more easily aroused when she next comes but it all depends on whether she returns. If she returns he will once again be happy otherwise he 'would die'. His direct language in this poem explores the intimacy and uncertainties at the heart of their relationship.

After the death of his beloved Anne, the content of Donne's poetry changes but his direct language and striking imagery remain. The Holy Sonnets reflect a deeply troubled soul searching for God's forgiveness. He dreads the idea of dying as he detested the thought of the physical corruption of the body. This idea is developed in one of the Divine Meditations *At the Round Earths Imagined Corners*. In the octet

he yearns for Judgement Day to arrive while he is still alive so as to avoid the physical corruption of the body and 'never taste death's woe'. This is based on the theological belief found in The Book of Revelations. On reflection however he changes his mind. The sestet reveals a deeply troubled soul in search of forgiveness. Donne realises that at this stage it will be too late 'to ask abundance of thy grace'. The poet begs that 'here on this lowly ground' God will teach him how to repent.

The profound internal crisis Donne experiences is further outlined in ***Batter my Heart Three Personed God***. His deep anxiety is rooted in an overwhelming sense of guilt. He has a deep desire to be free from the tyranny of sin. The language of this poem is again direct, powerful and physical. He wishes God to 'batter', 'breath', 'bend', 'break', 'blow', and 'burn' him. The plosive 'b' sound enhances the urgency of his request. The poem is argumentative in style and is satiated with Donne's unique wit. The idea of arguing with God is quite unconventional even today. His argument is based on three conceits. He compares God to tinsmith who must destroy his creation in order to 'make (him) new'. His second conceit likens God to a disposed ruler and he to a 'usurped town' whose soul has been 'captived and proves weak and untrue'. The final image is of a soul 'bethroed' to God's 'enemy'. Donne's request for God to 'divorce' him from this relationship is certainly an unconventional interpretation of a spiritual relationship with God. Donne's profound longing for salvation is powerfully evoked in the paradox of the final two lines. He will only be 'ever chaste' if God will 'ravish' him.

Donne's poetry has been described as intelligent, immediate and engaging. He greatly extended the scope and subject matter of poetic imagery and introduced a new tone to English love poetry. His work is as energising and refreshing today as it was in the 17th century.

Mary Carroll

EMILY DICKINSON

A staggering two thousand poems was Emily Dickinson's legacy to the world. She described it as her "Letter to the World" that never wrote back! She was born in December 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts and retired from society at the age of 25, which was customary for a spinster of her time. During the last two decades of her life her exclusion became extreme. There is much speculation about her reasons for seclusion; however the evidence is all conjectural and fragmentary. Dickinson's inner world became her only reality and her poems trace her attempt to gain insight into the human condition. She deals with the dramatic poles of human existence – ecstasy and despair. She also examines the nature of death and the possibility of immortality. She is in pursuit of sensation as much as fact. In her mindscapes she explores states ranging from rapturous joy to debilitating despair.

In her poem, 'I taste a liquor never brewed' we meet a very energetic, playful, joyfilled characters. This poem has the essence of an intensely imagined moment. The language is highly metaphorical. She describes herself as 'Inebriate of Air--.... and Debauchee of Dew - -'. She is intoxicated with the essence of summer and the dash captures the energy of summer, its never-ending nature. Stanza 3 and 4 are imaginatively striking. We see butterflies and bees drinking the experience of summer. The poem shows us Dickinson in an ecstatically happy state. The endless summer days allow her to imagine she is in heaven where the "Seraphs" and "saints" celebrate her rapturous wonder and play full rebellion.

The euphoria of this poem is in stark contrast with the nightmarish quality experienced in I felt a funeral in my brain. This poem conveys an overwhelming sense of physical, emotional and spiritual sufferings. The funeral is internal; it is "felt" in her "Brain". The funeral ceremony dramatizes her intense suffering. The internal death or breakdown is creatively described focusing on the sense of sound. Interestingly this is the final sense to leave us when we pass away. In the first two stanzas she feels the noise, the "treading – treading— and the incessant "beating—beating— until she can feel no more. We can empathize with the torturous mind in turmoil. All sense of reality deserts the poet at this stage. She can no longer feel or see, "Space" begins to "toll". Everything becomes an aural experience. Her description "Being, but an Ear," is suggestive of a

Picassoesque scene. Her whole sensory experience is condensed into one sense intensifying the magnitude of the experience, until she is “Wrecked, Solitary, here--”. The final stanza conveys the terrifying image of complete loss as she hits “a World, at every plunge”. She has lost all sense of reality, all sense of feeling, everything: “And Finished knowing”. However this is not the full story. Dickinson writes “And Finished knowing—then—”. The story has a sequel! “then”— is open to interpretation. All we can say for sure is that this is not the end. We know that Dickinson deliberately left the ending inconclusive. Is she incapable of communicating with us in this complete breakdown? Or has she arrived at some sense of epiphany, some great insight or enlighten?

Looking at her other poems we see that Dickinson is ultimately optimistic. In her poem “‘Hope’ is a thing with feathers,” she compares hope to a bird. She tells us that ‘sore must be the storm -- /That could abash the little Bird’. And that she has heard the song of this bird in ‘the chilliest land—/And on the strangest Sea—. This poem represents a state of mind that can see the light at the end of the tunnel. In times of anguish and exceptional difficulties it comes without asking anything for what it has given: ‘Yet, never, in Extremity, / It asked a crumb – of Me.’. It can withstand the greatest of spiritual and psychological storms and offers the warmth of consolation and encouragement. Hope is never ending”.

Her poem “There’s a certain Slant of light,” depicts the onslaught of sudden depression. It is a metaphoric dramatization of its mysterious origin. The slant of light in this poem is shadow light, that of a winter afternoon. It “oppresses” and hurts but leaves ‘no scar,’. But here too we see that this suffering, the ‘imperial affliction’ does not remain forever. ‘When it goes’ just like the winter light, a new season is born and from the distance we can look on Death.

Similarly in ‘After great pain’ we have a strong focus on the experience of recovery. Dickinson’s emotions are all used up. She is cold and numb. Her ‘Nerves’ are rigid and pained figures, sitting ceremoniously like ‘Tombs’. Here again there is a letting go—after the great pain. There is a sense of numb relief after her experience of the ‘Wooden way’.

The French poet Mallarmé says that ‘poetry is the language of a state of crisis.’ Dickinson makes great use of this language in recreating with words the many crises she experienced and ‘felt’. Her mindscapes are a rich

tapestry of pain and internal suffering. We can clearly appreciate why Dickinson has been called the greatest realist of the interior America has produced. The critic Sean Dunne described her poems as 'concise fragments from a diary, a logbook of the mind's voyages.... she wrote of a space equally vast: her own mind.' She believed that self-exploration was the only worthy kind of travel.

Dickinson's breathtaking brevity was the result of labour. She took exquisite care in composing 'lest words would be wasted'. She is strikingly original and eccentric and her uniqueness is visually and verbally exciting. She sometimes adopts various personas in her poems. This is evident in 'A narrow Fellow in the Grass', where she takes on the identity of a young boy. Dickinson, the keen observer of nature, is clearly evident here. This poem is a perfect example of her condensed style and her economical use of words. The presence of the snake is brought alive aurally and visually, without ever referring to him by name. We hear him continuously throughout the poem in her clever use of sibilance. We see this 'narrow Fellow', living in the 'Grass'. He appears suddenly and divides the 'Grass..... as with a Comb'. His shaft is 'spotted', and moves like a 'Whiplash / Unbraiding in the Sun'. He is elusive in nature, a mysterious creature. However any encounter with this 'Fellow' must not be taken lightly. Dickinson's is very aware of the danger lurking in nature. The tone of the poem is one of controlled terror. The child's panic is intense; he is paralyzed by this encounter. His meeting with the snake is fascinating but also fear-filled as his breathing tightens and feels a 'Zero at the Bone'.

Dickinson once described her world as 'Vesuvius at home'. This suggests a great emotional force and power. She had no audience for her work in her lifetime. For her the inner world of the mind, imagination, and heart were sufficient and she explored brilliantly and honestly. Philip Larkin comments: 'If Emily Dickinson could write over 700 pages of poems and three volumes of letters without making clear the nature of her preoccupations, then we can be sure that she was determined to keep it hidden, and that her inspiration derived in part from keeping it hidden.' He concludes: 'The price she paid was that of appearing to posterity as unfinished and willfully eccentric.' Dickinson brings us into her private inner world into the intensity of her ecstasy and despair and her 21st Century audience can appreciate a genius that stays and understands.

COMPARITIVE STUDIES

When embarking on Comparative Studies it is important to differentiate between your approach to studying Single Text and Comparative Texts. Single Text involves close reading whereas in Comparative Texts you read for the general storyline. In both you must study character and plot but in Comparative Studies you focus on **KEY MOMENTS** from your three texts. Your study should be **MODE** based i.e. **Theme/Issues, Cultural context, Vision and viewpoint** and you are expected to analyze, contrast and compare moments from your texts under these headings. You must **not** summarize your texts. Remember to compare means to look at similarities and differences. You are invited to “interact with the different worlds encountered and to make discriminations and evaluations.”P.71 Draft Guidelines.

THEME/ISSUES

In this section you are expected to focus on the central message presented by the writer and then to look at how the authors of your other texts treat the same message. For example: War/Violence, Power, Love, Revenge, National Identity/Racism, Isolation, Loneliness, Communication. Do they treat the theme similarly or differently? You should also consider both positive and negative aspects of your chosen theme. How are the main issues of the theme introduced to the audience? Are they immediately obvious or are they perhaps more subtle? Notice how the issues are developed. Who are the important characters in this development? How and where do the complications arise? How do the characters react to these situations? Always look at similarities and differences. What brings the theme to a climax in each text? What resolution do they arrive at? What insights are given at the conclusion? Is the story left open-ended and what effect does this have on the reader?

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Cultural context refers to the world of the text, the type of society we see represented in the society we are reading. We must enter “into the world of the text and get some insight and feel for the cultural texture of the world created.” P 71 Draft Guidelines. Look at how the main characters live, their values and beliefs and their day-to-day rituals. What is this world like for the men, women and children who populate the story? Are men or women the dominant force? Are children protected and innocent or are they exposed to great hardship? In what country is the text set? What are the similarities and differences between these settings? What decade/century is featured? What are the social and economic circumstances of the texts? How does the cultural context affect the happiness, fulfillment, frustration, and misery of the main characters? Look at the following list and chose about ***FIVE*** aspects to focus your answer on.

Historical period.

Place.

Social customs, traditions, rituals.

Class structures: upper, middle-class, working-class and the effect, if any, they have on the characters in this society.

Money, power, wealth: who are the powerful/ wealthy people? Are they male or religious?

Religious beliefs and values: evident in lifestyles, values, attitudes toward sex and marriage.

Work ethos in society.

Political situation.

Effects of poverty: helplessness, disease, desperation, violence, honour, pride.

VISION AND VIEWPOINT

This mode deals with the general vision and viewpoint of the author, director or dramatist. This study should incorporate what kind of impression of life the author portrays for the reader. Whether the overall vision is positive/negative. Is life seen as hope-filled or is the viewpoint hopeless or full of despair? What meaning of life presented to us, the audience, in this text? Sometimes our author has a very moralistic perspective. It is essential to remember that it is the ***author's vision and viewpoint*** that you are expected to deal with in this section.

Having outlined the point of view show where the author presents this, then compare and contrast this with your other texts. You can then examine the characters that are essential to displaying the author's viewpoint.

You could examine whether the vision of the text is relevant today. Is there a final moment of redemption in the texts?

A FINAL NOTE

It is essential in Comparative Studies that you use the language of comparison and that you continue to weave your texts together. Linking phrases are so important, such as; similarly, as in, texts are linked... typical of both... a corresponding moment...however, unlike...

Do not tell the story of the text. Marks are awarded for discussion of similarities and contrasts related to the modes of comparison being question.

Mary Carroll

LITERARY GENRE

How is story told? Fiction/non-fiction Drama/film?			
Narrator: first person/ Third person?			
How is plot developed? tensions complications climax resolution			
Chronology of story i.e. Time frame flashback sequential soliloquy letter diary voiceover			
Music how does it create atmosphere? does it relate to any specific character or event? is there a particular instrument used?			
Image/motif does it relate to one specific character? perhaps express theme?			

<p>Characters</p> <p>how well are they developed?</p> <p>how well is major character developed?</p> <p>does character use soliloquy/ diary/voiceover to reveal innermost thoughts?</p> <p>choices/needs of character?</p> <p>are minor characters important?</p>				<p>Setting.</p> <p>does it help the story?</p> <p>does it change the story?</p> <p>what is the establishing shot in film? Scene description in novel</p> <p>4. props</p>
<p>Setting the scene</p> <p>how does the setting help the story?</p> <p>does it change the story?</p> <p>establishing shot(film)</p> <p>scenery in text</p> <p>descriptions (novel)</p> <p>props: imagine the story without them</p>				
<p>Language</p> <p>descriptive</p> <p>realistic</p> <p>stage directions</p> <p>humour</p> <p>exaggeration</p> <p>farce</p> <p>subtle</p>				

<p>State theme: Look at positive/ Negative sides</p> <p>Is theme dealt with similarly or differently?</p>			
<p>Introduction of theme: how are the main issues introduced?</p> <p>are they subtle or obvious?</p>			
<p>Development:</p> <p>how is the theme brought forward?</p> <p>who are the important characters here?</p> <p>are there any catalyst characters?</p>			

<p>Complication /crisis:</p> <p>1. where does it arise?</p> <p>2. what is the complication in each text?</p> <p>how do the characters react to this situation?</p>			
<p>Resolution:</p> <p>what sort of endings or concousions are drawn?</p> <p>what are your feelings at this stage?</p>			

Cultural Context

	TEXT 1	TEXT 2	TEXT 3
In which historical period is text set? How important is this in the text?			
Where is the text set? Country place rural/urban castle/house/apartment			
What are the social customs, traditions, rituals?			
Class structures Upper/ middle/working class What effect does structure have on characters?			
Money/power/wealth Who has it? Male/ church?			

Religious beliefs Are they obvious in lifestyle? Values of group? Attitudes toward sex and marriage			
Work ethos in society?			
Political situation?			
Effects of poverty: helplessness Disease, desperation, violence, honour, pride.			
Role of men and women in society			

MARY CARROLL