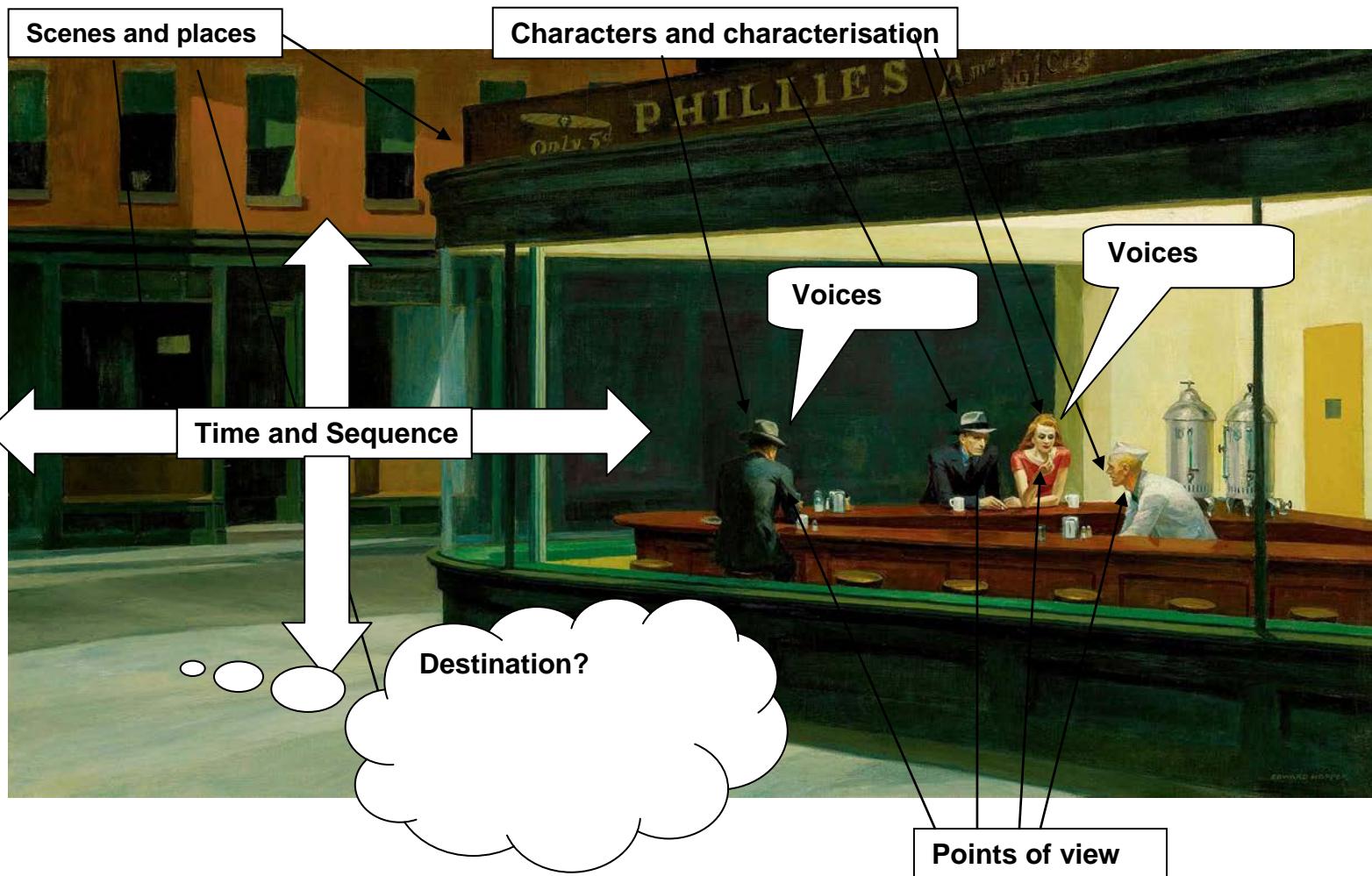


## AS English Literature Unit 1 – Narrative



## Easter Revision Booklet

The Great Gatsby...The Kite Runner...Tennyson...Rossetti...

## **Introduction to Narrative**

### **Key Terms**

**Story** = all the various events that are going to be shown

**Plot** = the chain of causes and circumstances that connect the various events and place them into some sort of relationship with each other

**Narrative** = involves how the events and causes are shown, and the various methods used to do this showing. Exploring aspects of narrative involves looking at what the writer has chosen to include or not include, and how this choice leads the reader to certain conclusions.

All stories are a form of **representation** – you are taking part in a constructed process. You are being shown something, being given a version by various narrative methods.

It is the author who controls the characters and events in a story. Characters cannot do or say anything other than what the author makes them do. For this reason, when asked to explore aspects of narrative in the exam, it is vital to keep the authors, and their methods of working, at the heart of what you say.

The word ‘narrative’ has its origins in the Greek word for knowledge. Ultimately, then, looking at narrative involves looking at knowledge.

### **The building blocks of narrative**

#### **Scenes and places**

Where the action is set and its significance beyond just being a place where something happens. Fictional stories, if they are to represent in some ways the real world, need to be set in significant places.

Stories are condensed versions of reality, shaped to present actions and ideas that tell us something about the lives we lead. Stories need to be set in places if they are to persuade us of their connections with our lives, but at the same time these places can be more than just settings where events happen. Scenes and places frequently carry a significance that goes way beyond being where something merely happens. In their use of scenes and places, authors are taking advantage of the possibilities of creating meanings.

In a poem, with its concise narrative, specifics of a place can be given without all the detail of precise location. The absence of any precise location helps us to think that the place could be anywhere, which makes the significance more widely applicable.

In addition to providing the necessary arenas for people and their actions to take place in, locations can also carry greater significance. The places are not only venues where things happen; they throw extra light and significance on events, people and relationships.

#### **Time and sequence**

The order in which events are shown is a key part of how narrative works. While time in the real world is represented by clocks and calendars which tick over at the same regular rate, time in stories is manipulated so that some points in time go slowly, others accelerate and others are missed out altogether.

All stories need to have aspects of time: **time covered by the events within the story**, and **the broader time which surrounds the story, the time in which the story is set**. If a story is to appear believable then the author will have to incorporate aspects of the life and

attitudes of the time. Timescales can be deliberately manipulated by writers to help them create subtle effects and meanings.

Sequence meanwhile refers to the order in which events are told. Although at a very simple level all narratives involve a movement from a beginning to an end, they are rarely told in strict sequence. *How* the sequence of events is presented to the reader is of considerable importance.

Chronology, then, is one way in which the writer of a narrative can influence the way a reader responds to it. This can lead to a focus on suspense, where the action and its results are foregrounded, or on character, where feelings and foregrounded, or sometimes both.

Poems by definition tend to be briefer exercises in narrative than novels. Whereas in a novel we expect some detailed establishment, in terms of place, time, people and so on, in poems we tend to be straight in and out of the story with much less detail. Indeed, the effects of the poem are often emphasised by what is not given, by what can be called meaningful absence.

## Characters

Character in this sense refers not just to the people in the story but, much more importantly, to their character traits and how they are revealed: this is known as characterisation. Characters in fictional texts are usually described early on, as part of the establishment of the text.

In narrative poems a couple of features are often enough to pin down not just what the character looks like, but what the character is like in a broader sense. Just as a name can conjure up ideas about a character's moral qualities, so can a description of their appearance. Authors can also signal aspects of character by giving their creations distinctive speech manners, or mannerisms. Sometimes these can be used to represent social class.

## Voices in the text

One way in which we get information in a story is through what we are 'told' by characters involved. Voices in stories can help to establish character traits, and so are part of characterisation, but they also enable authors to give information. Voices in texts can be the actual 'voices' of the characters who get to speak in the text, and they can also be the thoughts of characters and the voice of the narrator.

Narrative poems too have voices within them that help tell the story. How many voices, and what use is made of voices, can vary though.

## Point of view

The perspective from which events are told (eg: third-person or first-person narrative). The term point of view is very important when studying aspects of narrative. Where we, as readers, are 'placed' in the telling of the story is vital to the way we interpret it. This does not just refer to your physical position, this also relates to your position in terms of the beliefs you hold, the ideas you have.

Looking at point of view is important because it allows us to analyse narratives technically and also in terms of their ideas and views: how they see the world. Point of view is therefore both the technical description to do with how the text works and an indication of the **ideology**

in a text. (The **ideology** of a text is the attitudes, values and assumptions that the text contains). By exploring these elements we are able to arrive at a more complete reading of the text.

Another way in which the narrative point of view can be varied is by how close to the action we as readers are allowed to get. Is it viewed from a certain distance or is it viewed close-up? What is our proximity? Perspectives also frequently shift and move within texts.

Although poems sometimes give multiple points of view, more frequently they keep to one or two. Poetry tends to condense narratives, which may in part account for this. If only one point of view is given, then there is the potential for ambiguity – what would the story be like if it were told by another voice which is not heard?

## **Destination**

For the storytelling process to have any real purpose, you need to understand that the whole process is designed to make readers think, to make them respond to what is being said, to make them see the point or points. You have been taken on a journey in the story, and when you reach the end, you have reached a destination.

Consider the following things:

1. What have I seen about the methods used and how does this help me come to an interpretation?
2. Is there any contextual material worth considering in helping me to come to an interpretation?
3. Are different interpretations now possible? Is one more convincing than the other?

## Glossary of Literary Terms

**Complete the grid below with your own explanations and examples:**

Term/Feature	Explanation – its impact or effect	Example
<b>Alliteration:</b> the repetition of the same consonant sound, especially at the beginning of words		
<b>Ambiguity:</b> use of language where the meaning is unclear or has two or more possible interpretations of meanings.		
<b>Archaic:</b> language that is old-fashioned – not completely obsolete but no longer in current modern use		
<b>Assonance:</b> the repetition of similar vowel sounds		
<b>Author:</b> a real person who creates a text – not the narrator or implied author		
<b>Ballad:</b> a narrative poem that tells a story (traditional ballads were songs), usually in a straightforward way.		
<b>Blank verse:</b> unrhymed poetry that adheres to a strict pattern in that each line is an iambic pentameter (a ten-syllable line with five stresses).		
<b>Character/Characterisation:</b> how the personalities of the text are revealed through their actions and behaviour		
<b>Chronology:</b> the sequence or order of events in the text		
<b>Colloquial:</b> ordinary, everyday speech and language		
<b>Couplet:</b> two consecutive lines of verse that rhyme		
<b>Denouement:</b> the ending of a play, novel or drama where 'all is revealed' and the plot is unravelled		
<b>Diction:</b> the choice of words that a writer makes. Another term for 'vocabulary'		
<b>Distance:</b> (narrator's/reader's)		

<b>Dramatic irony:</b> when the reader is made aware of the disparity between the facts of a situation and a character's understanding of it		
<b>Dramatic monologue:</b> a poem or prose piece in which a character addresses an audience.		
<b>Elegy:</b> a meditative poem, usually sad and reflective in nature. Sometimes, though not always, it is concerned with the theme of death.		
<b>Endings – plot endings:</b> resolution or deliberate non-resolution. Or the last page or two of a text that act as epilogue or postscript		
<b>Enjambement:</b> where a line of verse flows on into the next line without a pause		
<b>Epiphany:</b> moment of great significance/intensity/recognition		
<b>Framing narrative:</b> literally a frame for a story		
<b>Genre:</b> a recurring literary form eg horror, gothic, romantic etc		
<b>Iambic:</b> the most common metrical foot in English poetry, consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable		
<b>Imagery:</b> the use of words to create a picture or 'image' in the mind of the reader.		
<b>Interior monologue:</b> capturing how thinking and feeling occur		
<b>Lyric:</b> originally a song performed to the accompaniment of a lyre (an early harp-like instrument) but now it can mean a song-like poem or a short poem expressing personal feeling		
<b>Metafiction:</b> narratives that call attention to their own fictional status and compositional procedures		
<b>Metaphor:</b> a comparison of one thing to another in order to make description more vivid. The metaphor actually states that one thing <i>is</i> the other.		

<b>Metre:</b> the regular use of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry (iambic, trochaic)		
<b>Motif:</b> a dominant theme, subject or idea which runs through a piece of literature		
<b>First/Second/Third person narration:</b> who is telling the story (I/You/He, she)		
<b>Narrative:</b> a piece of writing that tells a story		
<b>Narrative structure:</b> the way that a poem or play or other piece of writing has been put together.		
<b>Narrator:</b> the person who tells a story		
<b>Omniscient narrator:</b> narration which is all-knowing/godlike		
<b>Onomatopoeia:</b> the use of words whose sound copies the sound of the thing or process they describe		
<b>Opening:</b> how the story begins		
<b>Pathetic fallacy:</b> projection of human emotions onto phenomena in the natural world		
<b>Persona:</b> personality or mask constructed by author to speak in his/her name		
<b>Plot:</b> the sequence of events in a poem, play, novel, or short story that make up the main storyline		
<b>Poetic form:</b> ballad/elegy/monologue/lyric		
<b>Point(s) of view:</b> from which the story is told – fundamentally affects the way a reader will respond		
<b>Protagonist:</b> the main character or speaker in a poem, monologue, play, or story		
<b>Quatrain:</b> a stanza of four lines, which can have various rhyme schemes		
<b>Realism:</b> a narrative seemingly truer to the common sense realities of life		
<b>Refrain:</b> repetition throughout a poem of a phrase, line, or series of lines, as in the 'chorus' of a song		

<b>Revelations:</b> moments when the surface of things suddenly changes its meaning – when what we've read already shifts its meaning		
<b>Rhyme:</b> corresponding sounds in words, usually at the end of each line but not always		
<b>Rhyme scheme:</b> the pattern of the rhymes in a poem		
<b>Rhythm:</b> the 'movement' of a poem as created through the metre and the way that language is stressed within the poem		
<b>Sonnet:</b> a fourteen-line poem, usually with ten syllables in each line. The lines often consist of an octave and a sestet		
<b>Stanza:</b> the blocks of lines into which a poem is divided		
<b>Style:</b> the individual way in which the writer has used language to express his or her ideas		
<b>Symbol:</b> something representing something else		
<b>Tense:</b> the time in which the story takes place (present, past, future)		
<b>Tetrameter:</b> a verse line of four feet.		
<b>Theme:</b> the central idea or ideas that the writer explores through the text		
<b>Time shift:</b> moving forward and backward over time to allow us to make connections of causality and irony between events		
<b>Title:</b> the name of the text		
<b>Tone:</b> the overall impression or mood of the text, (mournful, upbeat)		
<b>Type/Stereotype:</b> a recurring kind of character		
<b>Voice:</b> the sensibility through which we hear the narrative even when reading silently		

## The Great Gatsby, by F. SCOTT FITZGERALD (from Sparknotes)

### Context

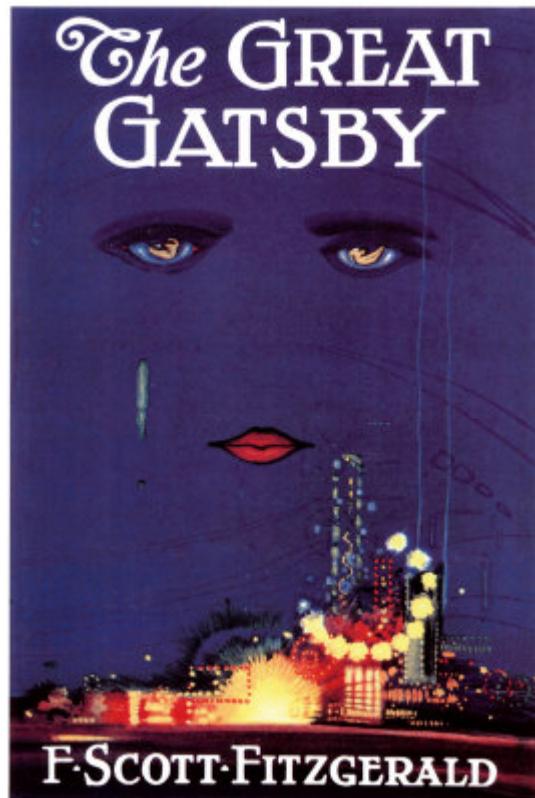
FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD WAS BORN on September 24, 1896, and named after his ancestor Francis Scott Key, the author of The Star-Spangled Banner. Fitzgerald was raised in St. Paul, Minnesota. Though an intelligent child, he did poorly in school and was sent to a New Jersey boarding school in 1911. Despite being a mediocre student there, he managed to enroll at Princeton in 1913. Academic troubles and apathy plagued him throughout his time at college, and he never graduated, instead enlisting in the army in 1917, as World War I neared its end.

Fitzgerald became a second lieutenant, and was stationed at Camp Sheridan, in Montgomery, Alabama. There he met and fell in love with a wild seventeen-year-old beauty named Zelda Sayre. Zelda finally agreed to marry him, but her overpowering desire for wealth, fun, and leisure led her to delay their wedding until he could prove a success. With the publication of *This Side of Paradise* in 1920, Fitzgerald became a literary sensation, earning enough money and fame to convince Zelda to marry him.

Many of these events from Fitzgerald's early life appear in his most famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925. Like Fitzgerald, Nick Carraway is a thoughtful young man from Minnesota, educated at an Ivy League school (in Nick's case, Yale), who moves to New York after the war. Also similar to Fitzgerald is Jay Gatsby, a sensitive young man who idolizes wealth and luxury and who falls in love with a beautiful young woman while stationed at a military camp in the South.

Having become a celebrity, Fitzgerald fell into a wild, reckless life-style of parties and decadence, while desperately trying to please Zelda by writing to earn money. Similarly, Gatsby amasses a great deal of wealth at a relatively young age, and devotes himself to acquiring possessions and throwing parties that he believes will enable him to win Daisy's love. As the giddiness of the Roaring Twenties dissolved into the bleakness of the Great Depression, however, Zelda suffered a nervous breakdown and Fitzgerald battled alcoholism, which hampered his writing. He published *Tender Is the Night* in 1934, and sold short stories to *The Saturday Evening Post* to support his lavish lifestyle. In 1937, he left for Hollywood to write screenplays, and in 1940, while working on his novel *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, died of a heart attack at the age of forty-four.

Fitzgerald was the most famous chronicler of 1920s America, an era that he dubbed "the Jazz Age." Written in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is one of the greatest literary documents of this period, in which the American economy soared, bringing unprecedented levels of prosperity to the nation. Prohibition, the ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol mandated by the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1919), made millionaires out of bootleggers, and an underground culture of revelry sprang up. Sprawling private parties managed to elude police notice, and "speakeasies"—secret clubs that sold liquor—thrived. The chaos and violence of World War I left America in a state of shock, and the generation



that fought the war turned to wild and extravagant living to compensate. The staid conservatism and timeworn values of the previous decade were turned on their ear, as money, opulence, and exuberance became the order of the day.

Like Nick in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald found this new lifestyle seductive and exciting, and, like Gatsby, he had always idolized the very rich. Now he found himself in an era in which unrestrained materialism set the tone of society, particularly in the large cities of the East. Even so, like Nick, Fitzgerald saw through the glitter of the Jazz Age to the moral emptiness and hypocrisy beneath, and part of him longed for this absent moral center. In many ways, *The Great Gatsby* represents Fitzgerald's attempt to confront his conflicting feelings about the Jazz Age. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald was driven by his love for a woman who symbolized everything he wanted, even as she led him toward everything he despised.

## Plot Overview

NICK CARRAWAY, A YOUNG MAN from Minnesota, moves to New York in the summer of 1922 to learn about the bond business. He rents a house in the West Egg district of Long Island, a wealthy but unfashionable area populated by the new rich, a group who have made their fortunes too recently to have established social connections and who are prone to garish displays of wealth. Nick's next-door neighbor in West Egg is a mysterious man named Jay Gatsby, who lives in a gigantic Gothic mansion and throws extravagant parties every Saturday night.

Nick is unlike the other inhabitants of West Egg—he was educated at Yale and has social connections in East Egg, a fashionable area of Long Island home to the established upper class. Nick drives out to East Egg one evening for dinner with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, an erstwhile classmate of Nick's at Yale. Daisy and Tom introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, a beautiful, cynical young woman with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. Nick also learns a bit about Daisy and Tom's marriage: Jordan tells him that Tom has a lover, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the valley of ashes, a gray industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle. At a vulgar, gaudy party in the apartment that Tom keeps for the affair, Myrtle begins to taunt Tom about Daisy, and Tom responds by breaking her nose.

As the summer progresses, Nick eventually garners an invitation to one of Gatsby's legendary parties. He encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, a surprisingly young man who affects an English accent, has a remarkable smile, and calls everyone "old sport." Gatsby asks to speak to Jordan alone, and, through Jordan, Nick later learns more about his mysterious neighbor. Gatsby tells Jordan that he knew Daisy in Louisville in 1917 and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are simply an attempt to impress Daisy. Gatsby now wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy, but he is afraid that Daisy will refuse to see him if she knows that he still loves her. Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house, without telling her that Gatsby will also be there. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection. Their love rekindled, they begin an affair.

After a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife's relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanans' house, Gatsby stares at Daisy with such undisguised passion that Tom realizes Gatsby is in love with her. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is deeply outraged by the thought that his wife could be unfaithful to him. He forces the group to drive into New York City, where he confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom asserts that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could never understand, and he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal—his fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to

Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him.

When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes, however, they discover that Gatsby's car has struck and killed Myrtle, Tom's lover. They rush back to Long Island, where Nick learns from Gatsby that Daisy was driving the car when it struck Myrtle, but that Gatsby intends to take the blame. The next day, Tom tells Myrtle's husband, George, that Gatsby was the driver of the car. George, who has leapt to the conclusion that the driver of the car that killed Myrtle must have been her lover, finds Gatsby in the pool at his mansion and shoots him dead. He then fatally shoots himself.

Nick stages a small funeral for Gatsby, ends his relationship with Jordan, and moves back to the Midwest to escape the disgust he feels for the people surrounding Gatsby's life and for the emptiness and moral decay of life among the wealthy on the East Coast. Nick reflects that just as Gatsby's dream of Daisy was corrupted by money and dishonesty, the American dream of happiness and individualism has disintegrated into the mere pursuit of wealth. Though Gatsby's power to transform his dreams into reality is what makes him "great," Nick reflects that the era of dreaming—both Gatsby's dream and the American dream—is over.

## Analysis of Major Characters

### Jay Gatsby

The title character of *The Great Gatsby* is a young man, around thirty years old, who rose from an impoverished childhood in rural North Dakota to become fabulously wealthy. However, he achieved this lofty goal by participating in organized crime, including distributing illegal alcohol and trading in stolen securities. From his early youth, Gatsby despised poverty and longed for wealth and sophistication—he dropped out of St. Olaf's College after only two weeks because he could not bear the janitorial job with which he was paying his tuition. Though Gatsby has always wanted to be rich, his main motivation in acquiring his fortune was his love for Daisy Buchanan, whom he met as a young military officer in Louisville before leaving to fight in World War I in 1917. Gatsby immediately fell in love with Daisy's aura of luxury, grace, and charm, and lied to her about his own background in order to convince her that he was good enough for her. Daisy promised to wait for him when he left for the war, but married Tom Buchanan in 1919, while Gatsby was studying at Oxford after the war in an attempt to gain an education. From that moment on, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, and his acquisition of millions of dollars, his purchase of a gaudy mansion on West Egg, and his lavish weekly parties are all merely means to that end.

Fitzgerald delays the introduction of most of this information until fairly late in the novel. Gatsby's reputation precedes him—Gatsby himself does not appear in a speaking role until Chapter III. Fitzgerald initially presents Gatsby as the aloof, enigmatic host of the unbelievably opulent parties thrown every week at his mansion. He appears surrounded by spectacular luxury, courted by powerful men and beautiful women. He is the subject of a whirlwind of gossip throughout New York and is already a kind of legendary celebrity before he is ever introduced to the reader. Fitzgerald propels the novel forward through the early chapters by shrouding Gatsby's background and the source of his wealth in mystery (the reader learns about Gatsby's childhood in Chapter VI and receives definitive proof of his criminal dealings in Chapter VII). As a result, the reader's first, distant impressions of Gatsby strike quite a different note from that of the lovesick, naive young man who emerges during the later part of the novel.

Fitzgerald uses this technique of delayed character revelation to emphasize the theatrical quality of Gatsby's approach to life, which is an important part of his personality. Gatsby has literally created his own character, even changing his name from James Gatz to Jay

Gatsby to represent his reinvention of himself. As his relentless quest for Daisy demonstrates, Gatsby has an extraordinary ability to transform his hopes and dreams into reality; at the beginning of the novel, he appears to the reader just as he desires to appear to the world. This talent for self-invention is what gives Gatsby his quality of "greatness": indeed, the title "*The Great Gatsby*" is reminiscent of billings for such vaudeville magicians as "The Great Houdini" and "The Great Blackstone," suggesting that the persona of Jay Gatsby is a masterful illusion.

*Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us.*

As the novel progresses and Fitzgerald deconstructs Gatsby's self-presentation, Gatsby reveals himself to be an innocent, hopeful young man who stakes everything on his dreams, not realizing that his dreams are unworthy of him. Gatsby invests Daisy with an idealistic perfection that she cannot possibly attain in reality and pursues her with a passionate zeal that blinds him to her limitations. His dream of her disintegrates, revealing the corruption that wealth causes and the unworthiness of the goal, much in the way Fitzgerald sees the American dream crumbling in the 1920s, as America's powerful optimism, vitality, and individualism become subordinated to the amoral pursuit of wealth.

Gatsby is contrasted most consistently with Nick. Critics point out that the former, passionate and active, and the latter, sober and reflective, seem to represent two sides of Fitzgerald's personality. Additionally, whereas Tom is a cold-hearted, aristocratic bully, Gatsby is a loyal and good-hearted man. Though his lifestyle and attitude differ greatly from those of George Wilson, Gatsby and Wilson share the fact that they both lose their love interest to Tom.

### **Nick Carraway**

If Gatsby represents one part of Fitzgerald's personality, the flashy celebrity who pursued and glorified wealth in order to impress the woman he loved, then Nick represents another part: the quiet, reflective Midwesterner adrift in the lurid East. A young man (he turns thirty during the course of the novel) from Minnesota, Nick travels to New York in 1922 to learn the bond business. He lives in the West Egg district of Long Island, next door to Gatsby. Nick is also Daisy's cousin, which enables him to observe and assist the resurgent love affair between Daisy and Gatsby. As a result of his relationship to these two characters, Nick is the perfect choice to narrate the novel, which functions as a personal memoir of his experiences with Gatsby in the summer of 1922.

Nick is also well suited to narrating *The Great Gatsby* because of his temperament. As he tells the reader in Chapter I, he is tolerant, open-minded, quiet, and a good listener, and, as a result, others tend to talk to him and tell him their secrets. Gatsby, in particular, comes to trust him and treat him as a confidant. Nick generally assumes a secondary role throughout the novel, preferring to describe and comment on events rather than dominate the action. Often, however, he functions as Fitzgerald's voice, as in his extended meditation on time and the American dream at the end of Chapter IX.

Insofar as Nick plays a role inside the narrative, he evidences a strongly mixed reaction to life on the East Coast, one that creates a powerful internal conflict that he does not resolve until the end of the book. On the one hand, Nick is attracted to the fast-paced, fun-driven lifestyle of New York. On the other hand, he finds that lifestyle grotesque and damaging. This inner conflict is symbolized throughout the book by Nick's romantic affair with Jordan Baker. He is attracted to her vivacity and her sophistication just as he is repelled by her dishonesty and her lack of consideration for other people.

Nick states that there is a “quality of distortion” to life in New York, and this lifestyle makes him lose his equilibrium, especially early in the novel, as when he gets drunk at Gatsby’s party in Chapter II. After witnessing the unraveling of Gatsby’s dream and presiding over the appalling spectacle of Gatsby’s funeral, Nick realizes that the fast life of revelry on the East Coast is a cover for the terrifying moral emptiness that the valley of ashes symbolizes. Having gained the maturity that this insight demonstrates, he returns to Minnesota in search of a quieter life structured by more traditional moral values.

## Daisy Buchanan

Partially based on Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, Daisy is a beautiful young woman from Louisville, Kentucky. She is Nick's cousin and the object of Gatsby's love. As a young debutante in Louisville, Daisy was extremely popular among the military officers stationed near her home, including Jay Gatsby. Gatsby lied about his background to Daisy, claiming to be from a wealthy family in order to convince her that he was worthy of her. Eventually, Gatsby won Daisy's heart, and they made love before Gatsby left to fight in the war. Daisy promised to wait for Gatsby, but in 1919 she chose instead to marry Tom Buchanan, a young man from a solid, aristocratic family who could promise her a wealthy lifestyle and who had the support of her parents.

After 1919, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, making her the single goal of all of his dreams and the main motivation behind his acquisition of immense wealth through criminal activity. To Gatsby, Daisy represents the paragon of perfection—she has the aura of charm, wealth, sophistication, grace, and aristocracy that he longed for as a child in North Dakota and that first attracted him to her. In reality, however, Daisy falls far short of Gatsby's ideals. She is beautiful and charming, but also fickle, shallow, bored, and sardonic. Nick characterizes her as a careless person who smashes things up and then retreats behind her money. Daisy proves her real nature when she chooses Tom over Gatsby in Chapter VII, then allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle Wilson even though she herself was driving the car. Finally, rather than attend Gatsby's funeral, Daisy and Tom move away, leaving no forwarding address.

Like Zelda Fitzgerald, Daisy is in love with money, ease, and material luxury. She is capable of affection (she seems genuinely fond of Nick and occasionally seems to love Gatsby sincerely), but not of sustained loyalty or care. She is indifferent even to her own infant daughter, never discussing her and treating her as an afterthought when she is introduced in Chapter VII. In Fitzgerald's conception of America in the 1920s, Daisy represents the amoral values of the aristocratic East Egg set.

## Themes, Motifs & Symbols

### Themes

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

### The Decline of the American Dream in the 1920s

On the surface, *The Great Gatsby* is a story of the thwarted love between a man and a woman. The main theme of the novel, however, encompasses a much larger, less romantic scope. Though all of its action takes place over a mere few months during the summer of 1922 and is set in a circumscribed geographical area in the vicinity of Long Island, New York, *The Great Gatsby* is a highly symbolic meditation on 1920s America as a whole, in particular the disintegration of the American dream in an era of unprecedented prosperity and material excess.

Fitzgerald portrays the 1920s as an era of decayed social and moral values, evidenced in its overarching cynicism, greed, and empty pursuit of pleasure. The reckless jubilance that

led to decadent parties and wild jazz music—epitomized in *The Great Gatsby* by the opulent parties that Gatsby throws every Saturday night—resulted ultimately in the corruption of the American dream, as the unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpassed more noble goals. When World War I ended in 1918, the generation of young Americans who had fought the war became intensely disillusioned, as the brutal carnage that they had just faced made the Victorian social morality of early-twentieth-century America seem like stuffy, empty hypocrisy. The dizzying rise of the stock market in the aftermath of the war led to a sudden, sustained increase in the national wealth and a newfound materialism, as people began to spend and consume at unprecedented levels. A person from any social background could, potentially, make a fortune, but the American aristocracy—families with old wealth—scorned the newly rich industrialists and speculators. Additionally, the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, which banned the sale of alcohol, created a thriving underworld designed to satisfy the massive demand for bootleg liquor among rich and poor alike.

Fitzgerald positions the characters of *The Great Gatsby* as emblems of these social trends. Nick and Gatsby, both of whom fought in World War I, exhibit the newfound cosmopolitanism and cynicism that resulted from the war. The various social climbers and ambitious speculators who attend Gatsby's parties evidence the greedy scramble for wealth. The clash between “old money” and “new money” manifests itself in the novel's symbolic geography: East Egg represents the established aristocracy, West Egg the self-made rich. Meyer Wolfshiem and Gatsby's fortune symbolize the rise of organized crime and bootlegging.

As Fitzgerald saw it (and as Nick explains in Chapter IX), the American dream was originally about discovery, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness. In the 1920s depicted in the novel, however, easy money and relaxed social values have corrupted this dream, especially on the East Coast. The main plotline of the novel reflects this assessment, as Gatsby's dream of loving Daisy is ruined by the difference in their respective social statuses, his resorting to crime to make enough money to impress her, and the rampant materialism that characterizes her lifestyle. Additionally, places and objects in *The Great Gatsby* have meaning only because characters instill them with meaning: the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg best exemplify this idea. In Nick's mind, the ability to create meaningful symbols constitutes a central component of the American dream, as early Americans invested their new nation with their own ideals and values.

Nick compares the green bulk of America rising from the ocean to the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. Just as Americans have given America meaning through their dreams for their own lives, Gatsby instills Daisy with a kind of idealized perfection that she neither deserves nor possesses. Gatsby's dream is ruined by the unworthiness of its object, just as the American dream in the 1920s is ruined by the unworthiness of its object—money and pleasure. Like 1920s Americans in general, fruitlessly seeking a bygone era in which their dreams had value, Gatsby longs to re-create a vanished past—his time in Louisville with Daisy—but is incapable of doing so. When his dream crumbles, all that is left for Gatsby to do is die; all Nick can do is move back to Minnesota, where American values have not decayed.

## **The Hollowness of the Upper Class**

One of the major topics explored in *The Great Gatsby* is the sociology of wealth, specifically, how the newly minted millionaires of the 1920s differ from and relate to the old aristocracy of the country's richest families. In the novel, West Egg and its denizens represent the newly rich, while East Egg and its denizens, especially Daisy and Tom, represent the old aristocracy. Fitzgerald portrays the newly rich as being vulgar, gaudy, ostentatious, and lacking in social graces and taste. Gatsby, for example, lives in a

monstrously ornate mansion, wears a pink suit, drives a Rolls-Royce, and does not pick up on subtle social signals, such as the insincerity of the Sloanes' invitation to lunch. In contrast, the old aristocracy possesses grace, taste, subtlety, and elegance, epitomized by the Buchanans' tasteful home and the flowing white dresses of Daisy and Jordan Baker.

What the old aristocracy possesses in taste, however, it seems to lack in heart, as the East Eggers prove themselves careless, inconsiderate bullies who are so used to money's ability to ease their minds that they never worry about hurting others. The Buchanans exemplify this stereotype when, at the end of the novel, they simply move to a new house far away rather than condescend to attend Gatsby's funeral. Gatsby, on the other hand, whose recent wealth derives from criminal activity, has a sincere and loyal heart, remaining outside Daisy's window until four in the morning in Chapter VII simply to make sure that Tom does not hurt her. Ironically, Gatsby's good qualities (loyalty and love) lead to his death, as he takes the blame for killing Myrtle rather than letting Daisy be punished, and the Buchanans' bad qualities (fickleness and selfishness) allow them to remove themselves from the tragedy not only physically but psychologically.

## Motifs

*Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.*

## Geography

Throughout the novel, places and settings epitomize the various aspects of the 1920s American society that Fitzgerald depicts. East Egg represents the old aristocracy, West Egg the newly rich, the valley of ashes the moral and social decay of America, and New York City the uninhibited, amoral quest for money and pleasure. Additionally, the East is connected to the moral decay and social cynicism of New York, while the West (including Midwestern and northern areas such as Minnesota) is connected to more traditional social values and ideals. Nick's analysis in Chapter IX of the story he has related reveals his sensitivity to this dichotomy: though it is set in the East, the story is really one of the West, as it tells how people originally from west of the Appalachians (as all of the main characters are) react to the pace and style of life on the East Coast.

## Weather

As in much of Shakespeare's work, the weather in *The Great Gatsby* unfailingly matches the emotional and narrative tone of the story. Gatsby and Daisy's reunion begins amid a pouring rain, proving awkward and melancholy; their love reawakens just as the sun begins to come out. Gatsby's climactic confrontation with Tom occurs on the hottest day of the summer, under the scorching sun (like the fatal encounter between Mercutio and Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet). Wilson kills Gatsby on the first day of autumn, as Gatsby floats in his pool despite a palpable chill in the air—a symbolic attempt to stop time and restore his relationship with Daisy to the way it was five years before, in 1917.

## Symbols

*Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.*

## **The Green Light**

Situated at the end of Daisy's East Egg dock and barely visible from Gatsby's West Egg lawn, the green light represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams for the future. Gatsby associates it with Daisy, and in Chapter I he reaches toward it in the darkness as a guiding light to lead him to his goal. Because Gatsby's quest for Daisy is broadly associated with the American dream, the green light also symbolizes that more generalized ideal. In Chapter IX, Nick compares the green light to how America, rising out of the ocean, must have looked to early settlers of the new nation.

## **The Valley of Ashes**

First introduced in Chapter II, the valley of ashes between West Egg and New York City consists of a long stretch of desolate land created by the dumping of industrial ashes. It represents the moral and social decay that results from the uninhibited pursuit of wealth, as the rich indulge themselves with regard for nothing but their own pleasure. The valley of ashes also symbolizes the plight of the poor, like George Wilson, who live among the dirty ashes and lose their vitality as a result.

## **The Eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg**

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are a pair of fading, bespectacled eyes painted on an old advertising billboard over the valley of ashes. They may represent God staring down upon and judging American society as a moral wasteland, though the novel never makes this point explicitly. Instead, throughout the novel, Fitzgerald suggests that symbols only have meaning because characters instill them with meaning. The connection between the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg and God exists only in George Wilson's grief-stricken mind. This lack of concrete significance contributes to the unsettling nature of the image. Thus, the eyes also come to represent the essential meaninglessness of the world and the arbitrariness of the mental process by which people invest objects with meaning. Nick explores these ideas in Chapter VIII, when he imagines Gatsby's final thoughts as a depressed consideration of the emptiness of symbols and dreams.

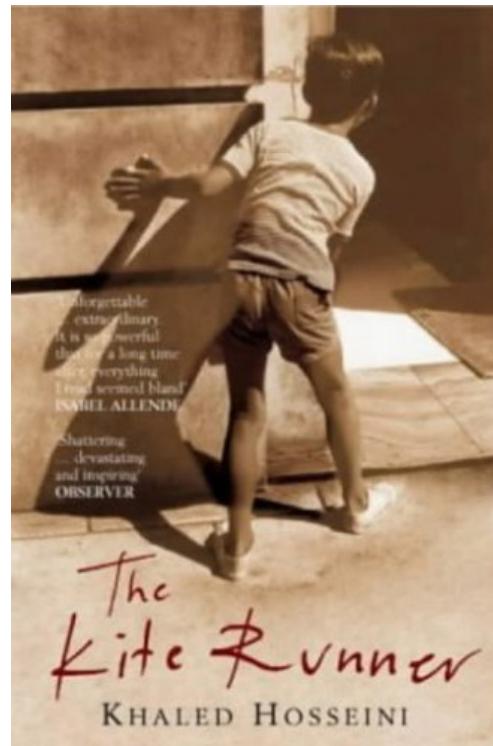
## ***The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini**

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### **About *The Kite Runner***

*The Kite Runner* is Khaled Hosseini's first novel. He was a practicing physician until shortly after the book's release and has now devoted himself to being an author and activist. The story of *The Kite Runner* is fictional, but it is rooted in real political and historical events ranging from the last days of the Afghan monarchy in the 1970s to the post-Taliban near present. It is also based on Hosseini's memories of growing up in the Wazir Akbar Khan section of Kabul and adapting to life in California. In a 2003 interview with *Newsline*, Hosseini specified that the most autobiographical parts of *The Kite Runner* are those about "the difficult task of assimilating into a new culture." He also revealed, "My father and I did work for a while at the flea market and there really are rows of Afghans working there, some of whom I am related to." Because Hassan did not return to Kabul until 2003, after *The Kite Runner*'s publication, much of his portrayal of Afghanistan after the Soviet takeover is based on research. Hosseini's choice of time period for the book, though corresponding with his own life, also went beyond his personal experiences. He has said that he did not just want to call attention to the devastation in Afghanistan; he set out to remind the world that until the last few decades, before the world's eye was drawn to it by violence, Afghanistan was a generally peaceful nation.



Structurally, *The Kite Runner* can be divided into three sections: memories of pre-conflict Afghanistan, adjusting to life in America, and returning to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Thematically, it can be divided into just two: life before the rape and life after the rape. From any angle, *The Kite Runner* is a tale of love, betrayal, and redemption and it gained an enthusiastic audience from the start. After its 2003 release, *The Kite Runner* became a New York Times Bestseller and was eventually published in thirty-eight different countries, although not yet Afghanistan. Critics praised the book's intimate examination of relationships amid the fraught and very topical environment of Afghanistan. Many of them, however, expressed disappointment regarding some coincidences, specifically the way that Amir and Assef reunite. One reviewer called the moment "more suited to a folk tale" and another even deemed it worthy of a "B movie." Despite such comments, critical and popular response to *The Kite Runner* was almost universally positive.

*The Kite Runner*'s most adoring readers and also some of its most critical are Hosseini's fellow Afghan expatriates. Hosseini said in a 2003 interview, "I get daily e-mails from Afghans who thank me for writing this book, as they feel a slice of their story has been told by one of their own. So, for the most part, I have been overwhelmed with the kindness of my fellow Afghans. There are, however, those who have called the book divisive and objected to some of the issues raised in the book, namely racism, discrimination, ethnic inequality etc." In addition to the deep feelings Hosseini's first novel aroused in the hearts of fellow Afghans, it also spurred a more lighthearted response, the resurgence of interest in kite fighting in America. The American invasion of Afghanistan may have 'put Afghanistan on the map' for Americans, but *The Kite Runner* goes farther by giving a detailed, human account of life and survival there. Its author continues this service to the

world by serving as an activist in addition to writing. Hosseini has said, "If this book generates any sort of dialogue among Afghans, then I think it will have done a service to the community." As we know *The Kite Runner* has sparked conversation among Afghans and countless other groups of people worldwide. It is not such a surprise to Hosseini's admirers that a physician, accustomed to caring for people's bodies, has made such a graceful transition to caring for their histories and spirits.

### **Context: The History of Afghanistan during the Time of *The Kite Runner***

*The Kite Runner* deals with the country of Afghanistan from the 1970s to the year 2002. Like all places, Afghanistan has a long and complicated history, but it came to international attention only after the coup of 1973. In order to orient ourselves, let us look at Afghanistan's geography. The nation is located in Central Asia and is made up of thirty-four provinces. The country's capital is Kabul, which is also the capital of the northeast province of the same name. Afghanistan means "Land of Afghan," Afghan being a name the Pashtun majority used to describe themselves starting before the year 1000. It is bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and for a short distance, China.

From 1933-1973, Afghanistan was a monarchy ruled by King Zahir Shah. On July 17, 1973, when the king was on vacation, Mohammad Daoud Khan seized power. Mohammad Daoud Khan was Zahir Shah's cousin and a former Prime Minister of Afghanistan. The military coup was nearly bloodless, but as we see through Amir's story, it was still a frightening time for the people of Kabul who heard rioting and shooting in the streets. For six years, Mohammad Daoud Khan was President and Prime Minister of Afghanistan. Then, on April 27, 1978, he was violently overthrown by the PDPA, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Daoud was killed in the coup along with most of his family. Even though Afghanistan had long insisted on maintaining its independence from Russia, the PDPA was a Communist party and therefore held close ties to the Soviet Union.

The PDPA instituted many political and social reforms in Afghanistan, including abolishing religious and traditional customs. These reforms incensed groups of Afghans who believed in adherence to traditional and religious laws. These factions began to challenge the government so rigorously that in 1979, the Soviet Army entered Afghanistan, beginning an occupation that would last a decade. This is the historical point in *The Kite Runner* when Baba and Amir leave Afghanistan. Throughout the ten years of Soviet occupation, internal Muslim forces put up a resistance. Farid and his father are examples in *The Kite Runner* of these *mujahedins* or men engaged in war on the side of Islam. The United States was among the countries that supported the resistance, because of its own anti-Soviet policies. When the Soviet Troops finally withdrew in 1989, Afghanistan remained under PDPA for three more years. Then in 1992, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore Soviet support for the government, the *mujahedin* finally won Afghanistan and converted it to an Islamic State.

In the years following Soviet withdrawal, there was a great deal of infighting among rival militias, making everyday life in Afghanistan unsafe. In *The Kite Runner*, Rahim Khan describes the fear in Kabul during this time. He remembers, "The infighting between the factions was fierce and no one knew if they would live to see the end of the day. Our ears became accustomed to the rumble of gunfire, our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days ... Was as close as you could get to that proverbial hell on earth." Then in 1996, the Taliban took control of Kabul. After so many years of insecurity and violence, the people welcomed the takeover. Rahim Khan remembers, "... We all celebrated in 1996 when the Taliban rolled in and put an end to the daily fighting." The Taliban were a group of Pashtun supremacists who banded together and took almost complete control of the country. Despite their warm initial reception, they soon made life in Afghanistan dangerous again. Being Sunni fundamentalists supremacists, they systematically massacred Shiites including the Hazara people. They

also enacted fundamentalist laws, most famously those banning music and dance, and those severely restricting women's rights. In *The Kite Runner*, we see how the Taliban used fear and violence to control the people of Afghanistan, for example at the frequent executions in Ghazi Stadium.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban. The end of *The Kite Runner* occurs in 2002, when a provisional government was in place. It was not until 2004 that the current president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, was elected. Today, there are countless Afghan refugees living in other parts of the world, just like Amir and his family. For those Afghans living in Afghanistan, life is still dangerous. In the South, conflict continues to rage on and the Taliban have managed to reemerge. According to Amnesty International's 2007 report, violence and human rights abuses are still a common reality in Afghanistan due to weak governance.

## Summary

The story is narrated from the year 2002. Amir, who is thus far a nameless protagonist, tells us that an event in the winter of 1975 changed his life forever. We do not know anything about this event except that it still haunts him and that it involves something he did to Hassan, whom he calls "the harelipped kite runner." Amir takes us back to his childhood, in the final decades of the monarchy in Afghanistan. His father, Baba, was one of the wealthiest and most charitable Pashtun men in Kabul, where they lived in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood. His mother died in childbirth. Amir's closest friend, the harelipped Hassan, was also his servant and a Hazara. He was very close to his father, Ali, who was Baba's servant.

Despite their differences, Amir and Hassan were inseparable. Hassan would have done anything for Amir; his first word was even "Amir." Baba was aloof and did not pay Amir much attention. He was a huge and imposing man who was rumored to have wrestled a bear. Baba did not subscribe to popular belief, preferring to cast his own opinions about issues. Baba wished Amir was athletic and brave like him instead of cowardly and bookish.

Amir explains how Ali and Baba knew each other. Baba's father took Ali into his house after Ali's parents were killed in an accident. Ali and Baba grew up together just like Hassan and Amir. In each generation, the boys could never truly consider themselves friends because of their class differences. One big difference divider was literacy. Amir was proud of his literacy and lorded it over the unsuspecting, illiterate Hassan. Yet when Amir wrote his first short story and read it to Hassan, it was the latter who found the plot hole in the story.

That same night, July 17, 1973, there was a coup d'etat in Afghanistan, changing it from a monarchy to a republic. Unbeknownst to the boys or anyone else, it was the first of many political changes that would eventually ruin Afghanistan as they knew it. One day, Amir and Hassan got into a confrontation with a boy named Assef and his two friends. Assef idolized Hitler and hated Hazaras. As usual, Hassan stood up for Amir; he got Assef to leave by aiming his slingshot at Assef's eye. That same year, Baba got Hassan surgery to fix his harelip.

In the winter, schools were closed in Kabul and the boys spent much time kite fighting. When defeated kites fell out of the sky, boys chased them to try to bring them home as trophies. They were called "kite runners." Amir usually flew a kite while Hassan ran kites for him. Hassan was the best kite runner anyone had ever seen. He had an innate sense of where a kite would land.

In the winter of 1975, there was a massive kite tournament. Amazingly, Amir won, and Hassan went to run the last kite for him. Before he chased it, he shouted, "For you, a thousand times over." When Hassan did not come home, Amir went out looking for him. He

found Hassan confronting Assef and his two friends in an alley. Amir did nothing to help Hassan as Assef raped him. Later he found Hassan walking home, kite in hand, with blood dripping from his pants. He pretended not to know what happened and did not tell Ali the truth when he asked.

After the kite tournament, Amir's relationship with his father improved because Baba was so proud of him. His relationship with Hassan degraded. Amir was too ashamed of what he had done to face Hassan and avoided him at all costs. One day he even suggested to Baba that they get new servants. To his surprise, Baba was furious and threatened to hit Amir for the first time. He said that Ali and Hassan were their family. Amir tried to resolve his guilt by teaching Hassan not to be so loyal to him. He took Hassan up to the hill and pelted him with pomegranates. No matter how much he begged, Hassan would not hit him back. Hassan smashed a pomegranate into his own forehead and asked Amir if he felt better.

Amir's guilt intensified at the lavish thirteenth birthday party that Baba threw for him. He knew Baba never would have given him such a great party had he not won the tournament, which was inseparable in his mind from Hassan's rape. Assef came to the party and gave Amir a book about Hitler. Amir was disgusted to see him teasing Hassan during the party. Baba gave Amir a wristwatch. Rahim Khan gave him the only present he could bear to use, which was a blank notebook for his stories. He also received a good deal of money. To his chagrin, Ali and Hassan gave him a copy of his and Hassan's favorite book. After the party, Amir decided to betray Hassan a second time and frame him as a thief. He hid his wristwatch and money under Hassan and Ali's mattress. The next morning, he accused Hassan, who took the blame as usual. Baba forgave him immediately, but Hassan and Ali were too humiliated to stay. As they left, Amir saw Baba weep for the first time. They never saw Ali or Hassan again.

Five years later, during the Soviet occupation, Amir and Baba fled Afghanistan in a truck full of refugees. When they reached a checkpoint, a Russian soldier demanded to sleep with one of them, a married woman. Baba stood up for her even though the soldier was armed. They were allowed to pass. After hiding in a basement in Jalalabad, they departed for Peshawar, Pakistan in the filthy tank of a fuel truck. Among the refugees were Amir's schoolmate, Kamal, and his father. When they arrived, they discovered that Kamal was dead. Kamal's father put a gun in his mouth and shot himself. Luckily, Amir and Baba managed to emigrate to the San Francisco area.

Baba and Amir's life in Fremont, California was very different from their life in Wazir Akbar Khan. Baba worked long hours at a gas station and even though he loved "the *idea* of America," had trouble adjusting to its everyday realities. For Amir, America represented a fresh beginning, free of all his haunting memories of Hassan. He graduated high school at the age of twenty and planned to enroll in junior college. His graduation gave Baba a reason to celebrate, but he said he wished Hassan were with them. Eventually, Baba and Amir started selling used goods at a local flea market. They found it to be a miniature Afghan haven, filled with people they knew from Kabul.

At the flea market, Amir fell in love with a young woman named Soraya Taheri. Around the same time, Baba got sick. A doctor diagnosed Baba with terminal cancer and Baba refused palliative treatments. Then one day Baba collapsed with seizures in the flea market; the cancer had spread to his brain and he did not have long to live. Very soon after, Amir asked Baba to go *khastegari*, to ask for Soraya's hand in marriage. The Taheris accepted happily. Over the phone, Soraya told Amir her shameful secret. She had once run away with an Afghan man. When General Taheri finally forced her to come home, she had to cut off all her hair in shame. Amir told Soraya he still wanted to marry her. He felt ashamed that he could not bring himself to tell her his secret in return.

After *khastegari* came *lafz*, "the ceremony of giving word." Because Baba was so ill, Soraya and Amir decided to forgo the *Shirini-kori*, the traditional engagement party, as well as the engagement period. Baba spent almost all his money on the *awroussi*, the wedding ceremony. Soraya moved in with Amir and Baba so they could spend his last days together. She took care of him until the night he died peacefully in his sleep.

Many people attended Baba's funeral, each with a story of how Baba had helped them in Afghanistan. Suddenly, Amir realized that he had formed his identity around being "Baba's son." Amir and Soraya moved into their own apartment and worked towards their college degrees. In 1988, Amir published his first novel. Around the same time, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, but new conflicts erupted. Soon after, the Cold War ended, the Berlin Wall fell, and the riots occurred in Tiananmen Square. In San Francisco, Amir and Soraya bought a house and discovered they were infertile. There was no medical explanation for the infertility, so Amir privately blamed it on his own shameful past.

One day, Amir received a call from Rahim Khan. He was seriously ill and was living in Peshawar. He told Amir, "There is a way to be good again." Amir flew to Peshawar to see Rahim Khan, who told him that he was dying. He explained that the Taliban had destroyed Afghanistan as they knew it and the people there were in grave danger. For a chapter, Rahim Khan becomes the narrator and tells Amir about what happened to Hassan. For a long time, Rahim Khan had lived in Baba's house alone, but he became weak and lonely. In 1986 he went looking for Hassan and found him living in a small village with his pregnant wife, Farzana. Hassan did not want to come to Wazir Akbar Khan until Rahim Khan told him about Baba's death. Hassan cried all night and in the morning, he and Farzana moved in with Rahim Khan.

Hassan and Farzana insisted on staying in the servants' hut and doing housework. Farzana's first baby was stillborn. One day, Sanaubar collapsed at the gate of the house. She had traveled a long way to finally make peace with Hassan, who accepted her with open arms. Sanaubar delivered Hassan and Farzana's son, Sohrab and played a large part in raising him. She died when he was four. Hassan made sure that Sohrab was loved, literate, and great with a slingshot. When the Taliban took over in 1996, people celebrated, but Hassan predicted that things would get worse, as they did. In 1988, the Taliban massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Rahim Khan gave Amir a letter that Hassan had written six months earlier along with a snapshot of him and Sohrab. In the letter, Hassan described the terror of living under the Taliban. He said he hoped Amir would return to Afghanistan and that they would reunite. Then Rahim Khan devastated Amir with the news that Hassan was dead. After Rahim Khan left to seek medical treatment in Pakistan, the Taliban showed up at Baba's house. They demanded that Hassan relinquish the house to them. When he refused, they took him to the street, made him kneel, and shot him in the back of the head. They shot Farzana too when she ran out of the house in a rage.

Rahim Khan asked Amir to go to Kabul and bring Sohrab back to Peshawar. He said that a nice American couple, the Caldwells, had a goodwill organization and would take care of him there. When Amir refused, Rahim Khan told him a life-changing secret: he and Hassan were half-brothers. Baba had shamed Ali by sleeping with Sanaubar, and because Ali was infertile, Hassan had to be Baba's son. Amir flew into a rage and ran out of Rahim Khan's apartment. After thinking things over at a cafe, he returned and said he would bring Sohrab to Peshawar.

A driver named Farid drove Amir from Peshawar. He looked down on Amir for leaving Afghanistan because he had stayed to fight the Soviets and suffered along with his country. He even told Amir that he had never been a real Afghan because he grew up with so many privileges. Amir did feel like a foreigner because he had to wear a fake beard and was

dressed in traditional Afghan clothing for the first time. He barely recognized the landscape around him because it was so ravaged by war. They spent the night with Farid's brother, Wahid. Wahid's boys were malnourished and later that night, Amir heard one of his two wives complaining that he had given all the food to their guests. The next morning, Amir hid money under Wahid's mattress before they left.

The devastation in Kabul took Amir's breath away. Children and mothers begged on every street corner, and there were few men to be seen because so many had died fighting. Amir met an old beggar who was once a professor at the university alongside Amir's mother. Amir learns only a few random facts about his mother from the man, but this is still more than Baba ever told him. At the orphanage in Kartehe-Seh, Farid and Amir discovered that a Talib official who was a pedophile had taken Sohrab a month before. Farid was so enraged at the man that he tried to strangle him to death, but Amir intervened. The man told them they could find the Talib at Ghazi Stadium. Farid drove Amir to Baba's house, which had become decrepit and was occupied by the Taliban. He and Farid spent the night in a run-down hotel.

Farid and Amir went to a soccer game at Ghazi Stadium. At halftime, the Talibs brought two accused adulterers out to the field and made them stand in pits in the ground. Then the Talib official came out and stoned them to death. Amir managed to make an appointment with this Talib for the same day. Farid drove him there, but Amir went in alone. The Talib had his men rip off Amir's fake beard. Then he called in Sohrab and made him dance for them. Sohrab looked terrified. Amir was horrified to discover that the Talib was Assef. Assef explained that he was on a mission to kill all the Hazaras in Afghanistan. Then he announced that he and Amir would fight to the death and none of his guards were to intervene. Sohrab was made to watch as Assef beat Amir nearly to death. As Assef straddled Amir, preparing to punch him again, Sohrab aimed his slingshot at Assef's eye and begged him to stop. When he did not, Sohrab put out his eye. Farid drove them away and Amir passed out.

Amir flitted in and out of consciousness in the Pakistani hospital where Farid took him. He dreamed about Baba fighting the bear, and realized that he was Baba. When he finally came to, he found out that he had almost died of a ruptured spleen. He had broken his ribs and a bone in his face and he had a punctured lung, among other injuries. Most poignantly, Amir's lip had split open to make him resemble Hassan. Sohrab visited Amir in the hospital but did not talk much. Farid brought a letter and a key from Rahim Khan. In the letter, Rahim urged Amir to forgive himself for what he did to Hassan. He had left Amir money in a safety deposit box, which the key would open.

Amir had to leave the hospital early in order to avoid being found and killed by Taliban sympathizers. He and Sohrab stayed at a hotel in Islamabad. The first night, Amir woke up to find Sohrab gone. After hours of searching he found him staring up at the city's big Shah Faisal mosque. Sohrab revealed that he was afraid God would punish him for what he did to Assef. He felt dirty and sinful from being abused. Amir tried to reassure him and promised to take him to America. He also promised Sohrab that he would never have to go to another orphanage. That night, Amir spoke to Soraya. After all their years of marriage, he finally told her what he did to Hassan. Then he told her he was bringing Sohrab home. Soraya was very supportive and promised to call her cousin Sharif, who worked for the INS.

At the American Embassy, an official named Raymond Andrews told Amir that it would be near impossible to get Sohrab a visa. To Amir's disgust, he told him to give up. Then a kind lawyer named Omar Faisal told Amir that he might have a chance of adopting Sohrab if he put him in an orphanage temporarily. When Amir told Sohrab about the orphanage, the boy was devastated. Amir rocked him to sleep and fell asleep as well. Soraya's call woke Amir. She explained that Sharif would be able to get Sohrab a visa. Realizing Sohrab was in the

bath, Amir went in to tell him the good news. He found him dying in the bathtub, having slit his wrists.

In the hospital waiting for news about Sohrab, Amir prayed for the first time in fifteen years. He begged God to let Sohrab live because he did not want his blood on his hands. Eventually, he received the good news that Sohrab was alive.

The story jumps to the present year, 2002. Sohrab and Amir were able to come back to America safely. It had now been a year since they arrived and Sohrab had not spoken once. He barely seemed to have a will to live. Amir kept Sohrab's past secret from the Taheris until General Taheri called him a "Hazara boy." Amir was furious; he told the general never to refer to Amir that way again. Then he explained that Sohrab was his illegitimate half-nephew. General Taheri stopped asking questions after that. After September 11, General Taheri was called back to Afghanistan. In the wake of what happened, Amir found it strange to hear people on the news and on the street talking about the cities of his childhood. It saddened him to know that his country was still being devastated after so many decades of violence. Then one day, a miracle happened.

At a rainy Afghan picnic, Amir noticed kites flying in the sky. He bought one and went over to Sohrab, who had secluded himself as usual. He told Sohrab that Hassan was the best kite runner he had ever known and asked Sohrab if he wanted to fly the kite. Sohrab was shy, but he followed Amir as he launched the kite into the air. Soon after, they noticed a green kite closing in on theirs. Amir used Hassan's favorite "lift-and-dive" move to cut the kite. Amir noticed the smallest hint of a smile on Sohrab's face. He offered to run the kite for Sohrab and as he ran off, he shouted, "For you, a thousand times over."

## Character List

**Ali** - Hassan's father. Ali is a Hazara whom Baba's father took in when his parents were killed. He grew up alongside Baba just as Hassan did alongside Amir. Ali has a crippled leg and paralysis in his lower face muscles and the neighborhood children ridicule him. He is as devoted and loyal as his son. Ali is killed by a land mine when Hassan is already grown.

**Amir** - The story's narrator and protagonist. He is an Afghan man who had a privileged childhood in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood of Kabul. The defining event in his life is his betrayal of his closest friend, Hassan. Amir lives in San Francisco from the age of eighteen. He returns to Afghanistan at the age of thirty-eight and ends up adopting Hassan's orphaned son, Sohrab.

**Assef** - A sociopath who worships Hitler. As a child, he is the neighborhood bully who rapes Hassan. As an adult, he is a Taliban official who delights in killing people. He keeps Sohrab as a sex slave until Amir comes to rescue him. After he beats Amir nearly to death, Assef loses an eye to Sohrab's slingshot. It is possible that Hosseini based the character of Assef on the reclusive one-eyed Taliban leader, Mullah Omar.

**Baba** - Amir's father. He is a wealthy and well-respected man with a dark secret; he had an affair with Ali's wife and Hassan is his illegitimate son. Baba wishes Amir were braver and stronger and that he could openly express his love for Hassan. Baba dies of terminal cancer in San Francisco shortly after Amir's wedding.

**Farid** - The Afghan man who drives Amir from Peshawar to Kabul and ends up helping him throughout his journey. He was injured fighting against the Soviets and is fiercely proud of his loyalty to Afghanistan. He saves Amir by taking him to a hospital in Pakistan.

**General Taheri** - Soraya's father. He is a former general who prefers collecting welfare to lowering himself to a blue collar job. He waits every day to be called back to Afghanistan.

**Hassan** - Amir's most loyal and devoted servant, who is born with a cleft lip. He and Amir were nursed by the same woman and, unbeknownst to them both, they are half-brothers. Hassan is illiterate but smart and stands up for others. He is also the best kite runner in Kabul. He dies at the hands of the Taliban, defending Baba's house from takeover.

**Khanum Taheri** - Soraya's mother. She is a kind woman who likes to sing, although her husband does not let her. She became a hypochondriac after suffering a stroke and loves Amir all the more for listening to her describe her ailments.

**Omar Faisal** - A lawyer who counsels Amir that his best chance is to place Sohrab in an orphanage temporarily. He was raised in America but speaks perfect Farsi.

**Rahim Khan** - Baba's closest friend and Amir and Hassan's confidant. He has an uncanny way of knowing what people are thinking and how to speak to them. He is one of the few people who knows Hassan's real identity and about his rape. He encourages Amir to be a writer by giving him a notebook and it is he who summons Amir back to Afghanistan to atone for his and Baba's sins.

**Raymond Andrews** - The official at the American Embassy who urges Amir to give up trying to rescue Sohrab. Amir thinks he is cruel and does not understand wanting a child until the secretary tells him that Raymond Andrews's daughter committed suicide.

**Sanaubar** - Hassan's mother. She was Ali's notoriously beautiful first cousin and second wife, who ran off with a troupe of dancers. She refused to even hold Hassan when he was born. Years later, she returns to Wazir Akbar Khan to beg forgiveness from Hassan and ends up helping raise Sohrab. She dies peacefully when he is four.

**Sofia Akrami** - Amir's mother, who died in childbirth. She was a professor of literature at the university and her books inspire Amir to become a writer.

**Sohrab** - Hassan and Farzana's son. After his parents are murdered, he stays in an orphanage in Karteh-Seh. Then he is a sex slave to Assef until Amir rescues him. Sohrab tries to commit suicide after Amir tells him he may have to stay in an orphanage again. Eventually, Amir and Soraya bring him to America and adopt him.

**Soraya** - Amir's wife. She shamed her family as a young woman by running off with a man. She takes care of Baba when he is ill and eagerly accepts Sohrab into her family.

**Wahid** - Farid's brother. When Amir stays at his house, Wahid is kind to him and does not judge him for being American. He calls Amir "a true Afghan."

## Glossary of Terms

**Hazara** - A term describing the Hazara people, an ethnic minority originating in the mountainous region of Afghanistan called Hazarajat. Characterized by their mongoloid facial features, adherence to Shi'a Islam, and long history of persecution.

**Hypochondriac** - One who is consistently and habitually convinced he is ill when he is not.

**INS** - Immigration and Nationalization Service of the United States of America. Formerly, the government agency that oversaw immigration issues. Now the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

**Mazar-i-Sharif** - A large city in Afghanistan famous for its Blue Mosque. The Taliban massacred the Hazara population there in 1998.

**Mujahedin** - A term used to describe a group of Muslims engaged in a war or conflict. In this novel, it describes the Afghanistan Mujahedin Freedom Fighters Front, which challenged the Soviet forces and later lost against the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) government.

**Pashtun** - An ethnic group forming a majority in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. Characterized by adherence to Sunni Islam as well as Pashtunwali, an ancient code of tradition.

**Shi'a Islam** - The second largest denomination of the Islamic faith. Shi'a Islam believes that the teachings of Muhammad were carried through his descendants and do not accept the caliphate.

**Shorawi** - The Farsi term for the Soviets, who invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and occupied the country for a decade.

**Sunni Islam** - The largest denomination of Islam. Sunni Islam accepts the caliphate, meaning that it considers the Caliph or head of a Muslim state a successor to Muhammad.

**Wazir Akbar Khan** - The neighborhood in Kabul where Amir and Hassan grew up.

## Major Themes

### Kites

One can tell kites are central to the novel just by reading its title, "The Kite Runner." On a plot level, the grand kite tournament of 1975 sets a circle of betrayal and redemption into motion, around which the story revolves. After Hassan gets raped while running his kite, Amir cannot separate kite fighting and running from his own betrayal and cowardice. Therefore, even after all of his injuries and trials on Sohrab's behalf, it is the act of kite running that finally makes him feel redeemed. Beyond their significance to the plot, kites have multiple layers of symbolism in the story. One of these layers involves the class difference between Amir and Hassan, which largely dictates and limits their relationship. In kite fighting, one boy controls the kite while the other assists by feeding the string. Just as Hassan makes Amir's breakfast, folds his clothes, and cleans his room, so does he cater to Amir in kite tournaments. Even though Hassan shares in the excitement of kite fighting, he does not actually have control over the kite. Hassan may help the kite "lift-and-dive," but Amir is the one who claims a victory. Hassan may catch a cherished rival kite and hold it in his arms, but always to bring it back to Amir, to whom it then belongs. His joy is vicarious, just like his experience of wealth and privilege while living in Baba's household. In order to free himself of selfishness and cowardice, Amir must go from being merely a kite fighter—someone who seeks glory—to a kite runner, someone who genuinely does things for others.

The activity of kite fighting is violent by nature. The kites battle and so too do the children flying them. The string, which is covered in ground glass, carves deep gashes into the fliers' hands as they try to cut each other down, and once kites fall out of the sky, the kite runners retrieve them with the same furious determination as, say, a hunting dog does a slain bird. In its violence, kite fighting represents the conflicts that rage Afghanistan nearly throughout the course of the novel. When Hosseini paints us a picture of hundreds of kites trying haphazardly and with great determination to cut each other down, he shows us also the warring factions of Afghanistan overthrowing one another. At the same time kite fighting is violent, the mere act of kite flying is innocent and speaks of freedom. Amir and Hassan do not have control over the differences between them; in fact, they are both the victims of a lie, and their relationship would have been different had they known they were brothers. Yet despite their differences and the symbolism of their respective kite-fighting roles, flying kites is an activity that brings the boys together. For a moment, they are part of a team. For

many years, Amir feels as though he and Hassan are adversaries for Baba's love. After the rape, Hassan's very existence infuriates Amir because it reminds him of his cowardice. Despite all this, when the boys fly kites together, they are on the same team. They are more like brothers than perhaps any other time, because the activity is somewhat mutual. It allows them to momentarily escape their differences and enjoy a shared sense of exhilaration and freedom. The cover of *The Kite Runner* shows a kite flying very high over Kabul. This image can be seen to represent Amir and Hassan's shared sense of freedom, one that takes them away from life's realities until the kite is grounded again.

## Discrimination

*The Kite Runner* tackles the issue of ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan with an example of the relationship between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Baba's father sets an example for him of being kind to Hazara people, even though they are historically demeaned and persecuted. He could have easily sent Ali to an orphanage after his parents' death, but chose to raise him in his household. Baba does the same with Hassan, although this is complicated by the fact that Hassan is actually his son. Even in Baba's house, the house of best intentions, the class barrier between the Pashtuns and Hazaras endures. Ali is as dear to Baba as a brother; he calls him "family." But Ali still lives in a hut and sleeps on a mattress on the floor. He tends the garden, cooks, and cleans up after Baba, and raises Hassan to do the same. So strong is Hassan's identity as a servant that even as an adult, when Baba is gone, he has no sense of entitlement. He insists on staying in the hut and doing housework. When Hassan dies defending Baba's house, he does so not because he feels it belongs to him, but because he is being loyal to Baba and Amir.

In Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, discrimination is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. On the one hand, the Taliban do not seem to care whom they are beating, torturing, or executing. Children like Sohrab and grandmothers like Sanaubar are all susceptible to the Taliban's cruelty. In this way, the Talibs discriminate against everyone but themselves. As Amir notices, Assef forces Sohrab to dance to music for his enjoyment dancing and listening to music have long been banned. Amir thinks, "I guessed music wasn't sinful as long as it played to Taliban ears." On another level, the Taliban discriminate specifically against the Hazara people. They massacre the Hazaras not only in Mazar-i-Sharif, but in the region of Hazarajat and nearly anywhere else they can find them. Assef and his fellows do not see the Hazaras' lives as worthwhile; they barely see them as human. Assef tells Amir, "Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage." Like his idol, Hitler, he feels entitled to killing those he deems unworthy of living in his land. He even relishes the term "ethnic cleansing" because it goes so well with his garbage metaphor. Hosseini has mentioned in interviews that his focus on discrimination in *The Kite Runner* angers some Afghans, who feel it is inappropriate. Like Baba, many people do not mention the Hazaras' history of persecution. Perhaps these people are so uncomfortable with this topic because by having Assef appear in pre-Taliban times and emerge as a leading Talib, Hosseini shows that the Taliban's persecution of the Hazaras and other Shiites is not new, but a greatly intensified outgrowth of long-held discrimination.

## Sin and Redemption

In *The Kite Runner*, redemption is so important because sin is so enduring. Amir opens the story by telling us not about how exactly he sinned, but about sin's endurance: "... It's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out." Hosseini uses structure to emphasize the themes of sin and redemption. Because Amir tells the story in retrospect, every memory, even the blissful ones of his childhood before the rape, are tainted with it. If the timeline of the novel was strictly chronological, we would not have the power of hindsight. Hosseini uses the first chapter almost like a thesis for the novel. As Amir retells the story of his life, he weighs

each event against his sin, his betrayal of Hassan. As we learn towards the novel's end, Amir is not the only character who needs redemption, Assef notwithstanding. Until Rahim Khan reveals Baba's secret, Amir thinks he is the only sinner among his family and friends. Even before Amir betrays him, Hassan makes him feel guilty simply by being such a righteous person. Amir is constantly trying to measure up to Baba, because he does not realize that Baba is so hard on him because of his guilt over his own sin.

One Amir finds out about Baba's sin, he feels as though his entire life has been a cycle of betrayal, even before he betrayed Hassan. But having a taste of betrayal himself does little towards redeeming Amir. In Ghazi Stadium, the Taliban skews the words of Muhammad in order to justify murdering the alleged adulterers. The mullah announces that every person should have a punishment befitting his sin. Although he would not want to compare himself to the Taliban, Amir believes this in regards to his own sin. When he tries to get Hassan to pelt him with pomegranates, he is expressing his feeling that in order to be forgiven for hurting Hassan, Hassan must hurt him. When Assef almost kills Amir, he feels "healed," as though now that Assef has hurt him, he is redeemed. He even tells Farid that in the room with Assef, he "got what he deserved." In the end, Amir finds out that punishment is not what will redeem him from his sin. It is not even saving Sohrab. In order to atone for his sin and Baba's before him, Amir must erase the lines of discrimination he has lived with all his life by giving Sohrab an equal chance at success and happiness.

Soraya needs Amir to forgive her before she can marry him. In the same way, Rahim Khan needs Amir to forgive him for keeping Baba's secret before he dies. Rahim Khan, the story's unofficial wise man, is the one who truly understands how redemption occurs. He tells Amir in his letter, "I know that in the end, God will forgive. He will forgive your father, me, and you too ... Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But most important, forgive yourself." Rahim Khan carries the novel's ultimate message about forgiveness. God is merciful; it is people who are not. Therefore, truly atoning for one's sins means coming to terms with them by oneself, without relying on a higher power. When Amir prays, he is still bound by fear and guilt; instead of wishing unselfishly for Sohrab to recover, he begs God not to leave "Sohrab's blood on his hands." When Amir manages to forgive himself in the very last moments of the novel, he redeems himself at last.

### **Literacy and the Written Word**

In the novel, writing is both a dividing force and a uniting one. Amir's wish to be a writer separates him from Baba, who wants him to be athletic and equates his bookishness with weakness. In Amir's young life, his ability to read and write separates him from Hassan. Because Hassan is a Hazara and expected to remain a servant like Ali before him, no one makes sure he is literate. While Amir goes to school every day, Hassan stays behind and does his chores. On the one hand, Hassan's illiteracy brings him closer to Amir. The boys spend countless hours together under the pomegranate tree, Amir reading stories to Hassan. When Amir begins to write stories, Hassan is his rapt audience. Yet Amir realizes that being literate gives him power over Hassan. He lords his advantage over the unsuspecting Hassan by making up stories while pretending to read and teasing Hassan for not knowing certain words. Only later does Hassan realize the power of literacy and its connection to social power. He makes sure that Sohrab can read and write and expresses his wish for Sohrab to be "someone important."

Despite the connection between literacy and discrimination, the written word is largely a unifying force in the novel. One thing that makes Amir admire Soraya even more is her story of how she taught an illiterate woman to read and write. That act of teaching unified Soraya and the woman; the telling of it brings her and Amir closer together. Traditionally, the power of the written word is located in its endurance beyond death. This rings true in the novel when Amir reads Hassan's letter, although as he reads it he does not yet know Hassan is dead. Additionally remarkable about Hassan's letter is that it puts him on an

equal level with Hassan; now that he is literate, written words are no longer a barrier between them. Rahim Khan's letter is the final one in the novel, and it is also the one containing the ultimate message about forgiveness. Hosseini gives extra emphasis to writing's importance by putting this central message in written form.

## **Family Ties**

Family is extremely important in the story, especially because it takes place in Afghanistan. It is a nation where culture and tradition are of monumental importance, especially to the older generation. We see this when Baba and Amir are in America. Even though they are in a different country, Amir is expected to observe cultural tradition in courting Soraya. Not only must they go through *khastegari*, in order to get engaged, but they cannot be seen together in public before the wedding. One the one hand, everyone in Afghanistan is part of one family; as Baba says, "Take two Afghans who've never met, put them in a room for ten minutes, and they'll figure out how they're related." On the other hand, lineage is of the utmost importance. When Amir and Soraya are considering adopting a child, General Taheri explains that Afghans are not meant to disturb their family line with such a decision. He tells them that Baba's reputation was a big consideration in regards to their marriage and says, "Blood is a powerful thing ... And when you adopt, you don't know whose blood you're bringing into your house."

What General Taheri does not know is that for the very reason that family is so important to Afghans, Baba kept Hassan's identity secret to his grave. To him, denying Hassan his identity was preferable to confusing the relationship between Ali and himself and that between Amir and Hassan. Baba treats Ali and Hassan as equally as he felt he could without destroying his and Ali's honor, but Baba knows that they are his family. Amir does not have this privilege and his ignorance makes him more irreverent towards Hassan, who is loyal as a brother to him anyway. Family is more important to Amir than he knows; his guilt over hurting Hassan is terrible when he thinks Hassan is just another person. Once he knows they are related, he is overcome with guilt, enough to put himself in danger and stand up for Sohrab. For much of his life, Amir feels as though his family is the cause of his problems. He thinks Baba blames him for his mother's death and spends much of his childhood tormented by trying to win a place in Baba's heart. Family is the reason why Amir fights to bring Sohrab home and, ultimately, the channel through which he redeems himself.

## **Violence**

Even though Hosseini has stated that he wanted to remind people of a peaceful Afghanistan, he also does the service of revealing the suffering the nation has experienced in a quarter century of conflict. Violence pervades the novel, even in the seemingly innocuous activity of kite fighting. Not only is kite fighting violent because it is a kind of battle, but boys injure their hands when they participate. This fact suggests that Afghanistan has become a place where joy cannot exist separately from pain; Afghans' memories of their homeland are tainted with suffering. The entire novel centers around a single act of violence, Hassan's rape, and the sin Amir commits by pretending that violence did not occur. Symbolically, Hassan's rape is echoed by Sohrab's rape decades later and by Afghanistan's continual rape by war and terrorism.

Amir's life in America does involve suffering, especially regarding Baba's death. But Baba's death is peaceful. Because America is a haven from violence, the violence under the Taliban in Kabul is even more shocking and sobering. Amir gets a taste of violence when he and Baba are fleeing for Pakistan and Kamal's father commits suicide. However, nothing can prepare him for the extent of violence and suffering in Afghanistan. One of the most graphic accounts is of the stonings at Ghazi Stadium. Like the rapes of Hassan and Sohrab, the event symbolizes the devastation of Afghanistan as a whole, as Afghans once

knew it. Another very violent event is Amir's fight with Assef. At the time, Amir's pain makes him feel happy and "healed"; it is as though by suffering, he is repaying Hassan for all the violence he suffered on Amir's behalf. Amir's split lip, though minor compared to his other injuries, is most significant because it represents this feeling of closeness to Hassan. Yet we learn that violence is not the answer to Amir's problems, nor does he understand just how deep its consequences run. When young Sohrab tries to kill himself, Amir sees that his nearly fatal injuries were nothing compared to the pain Sohrab and other Afghans have suffered. Ultimately, he finds out that the only way to heal the violence done to Hassan and Sohrab is to forgive himself.

## **Homeland and Nationality**

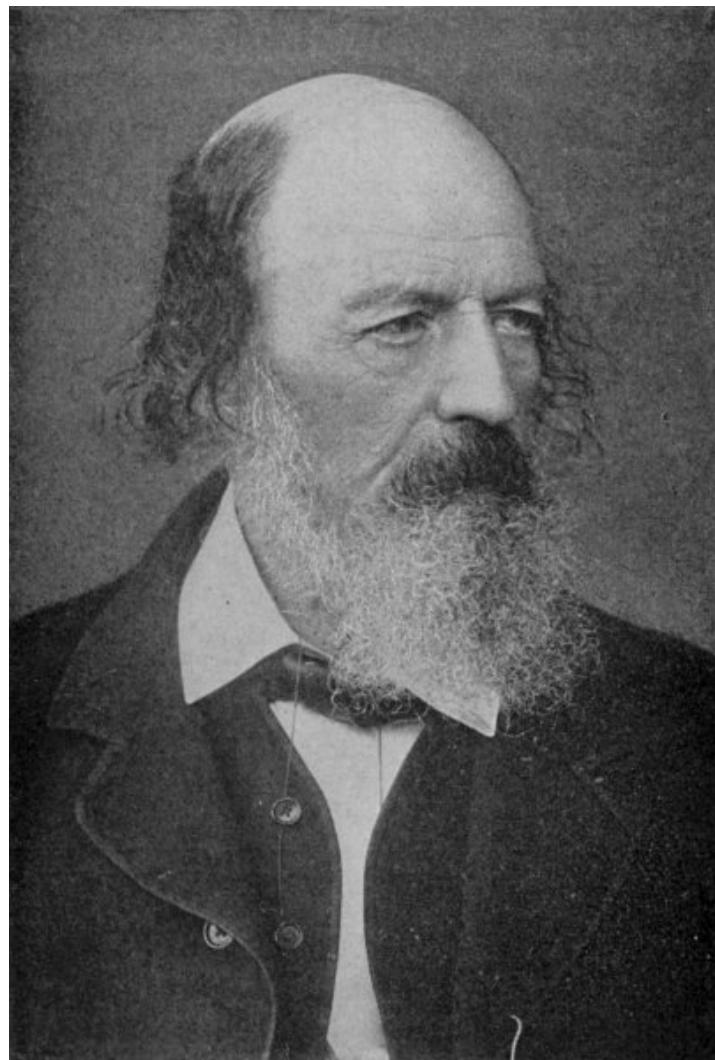
Because Amir immigrates to the United States when he is still growing up, the question of his national identity is especially complex. Baba sees America as a refuge and becomes enthralled, as Amir says, with "the *idea* of America." He identifies with American optimism and freedom of choice, and even hangs a framed picture of Ronald Reagan on the wall of their apartment. Up until his death, Baba is a guest in America; Afghanistan is undeniably the place where he can be himself. There, he was a successful and influential figure. In America, he must work at the gas station and suffer the humiliation of being a foreigner, as with the Nguyens. For young Amir, America is not only politically free, but more importantly, free of Hassan and memories of him. He uses the image of a river to describe the exhilaration and cleansing effect that being in America has on him. He opens his arms wide to America, even though he maintains Afghan traditions regarding courtship and writes a novel about Afghanistan. Because he comes into adulthood in America, Amir does not suffer along with his fellow Afghans. As he discovers, this makes all the difference in defining his national identity.

Amir's coming to Afghanistan should by all accounts be a homecoming, but Amir can never truly revisit his homeland; it no longer exists as he knew it. In the interim between Amir's flight from Kabul and his return, the Soviets, warring factions, and the Taliban have turned it from a culturally rich and bustling place into a ghost town of beggars among the rubble and hanging corpses. Amir can no longer be an Afghan because being an Afghan has become synonymous with having survived terror, if not much worse. According to Farid, however, Amir never had an Afghan identity to lose. He tells Amir that his privileged upbringing has made him a "tourist" in Afghanistan all his life. Amir himself tells Rahim Khan that he cannot go to Afghanistan because he has a wife, a home, and a life in America. Through these conversations, Hosseini asks what constitutes a homeland, a *watan*. If Farid is right, then Amir has no homeland. However, once Farid finds out why Amir has returned to Afghanistan, he changes his opinion of him. He seems to accept him as a friend, if not a countryman. According to the novel, then, one's homeland depends not only on one's emotional attachment to a place but one's tangible devotion to it. To make a place one's homeland, Hosseini seems to suggest, one must be willing not merely to dwell on nostalgic feelings but to put them into action—whether like Farid, by fighting in a trench, or like Amir, by trying to save someone from the homeland itself.

## **ALFRED LORD TENNYSON** **(from Sparknotes)**

### **Context**

The English poet Alfred Tennyson was born in Sommersby, England on August 6, 1809, twenty years after the start of the French Revolution and toward the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He was the fourth of twelve children born to George and Elizabeth Tennyson. His father, a church reverend, supervised his sons' private education, though his heavy drinking impeded his ability to fulfill his duties. His mother was an avid supporter of the Evangelical movement, which aimed to replace nominal Christianity with a genuine, personal religion. The young Alfred demonstrated an early flair for poetry, composing a full-length verse drama at the age of fourteen. In 1827, when he was eighteen, he and his brother Charles published an anonymous collection entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*, receiving a few vague complimentary reviews.



That same year, Tennyson left home to study at Trinity College, Cambridge, under the supervision of William Whewell, the great nineteenth-century scientist, philosopher, and theologian. University life exposed him to the most urgent political issue in his day--the question of Parliamentary Reform, which ultimately culminated in the English Reform Bill of 1832. Although Tennyson believed that reform was long overdue, he felt that it must be undertaken cautiously and gradually; his university poems show little interest in politics.

Tennyson soon became friendly with a group of undergraduates calling themselves the "Apostles," which met to discuss literary issues. The group was led by Arthur Henry Hallam, who soon became Tennyson's closest friend. Tennyson and Hallam toured Europe together while still undergraduates, and Hallam later became engaged to the poet's sister Emily. In 1830, Tennyson published *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, to Hallam's great praise. However, within the larger critical world, this work, along with Tennyson's 1832 volume including "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Lotos-Eaters," met with hostile disparagement; the young poet read his reviews with dismay.

In 1833, no longer able to afford college tuition, Tennyson was living back at home with his family when he received the most devastating blow of his entire life: he learned that his dear friend Hallam had died suddenly of fever while traveling abroad. His tremendous grief at the news permeated much of Tennyson's later poetry, including the great elegy "In Memoriam." This poem represents the poet's struggles not only with the news of his best friend's death, but also with the new developments in astronomy, biology, and geology that were diminishing man's stature on the scale of evolutionary time; although Darwin's *Origin of Species* did not appear until 1859, notions of evolution were already in circulation, articulated in Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33) and Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844).

Tennyson first began to achieve critical success with the publication of his *Poems* in 1842, a work that included "Ulysses," "Tithonus," and other famous short lyrics about mythical and philosophical subjects. At the time of publication, England had seen the death of Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats, and indeed all of the great Romantic poets except Wordsworth; Tennyson thus filled a lacuna in the English literary scene. In 1845, he began receiving a small government pension for his poetry. In 1850, Wordsworth, who had been Britain's Poet Laureate, died at the age of 80; upon the publication of "In Memoriam," Tennyson was named to succeed him in this honor. With this title he became the most popular poet in Victorian England and could finally afford to marry Emily Sellwood, whom he had loved since 1836. The marriage began sadly--the couple's first son was stillborn in 1851--but the couple soon found happiness: in 1853 they were able to move to a secluded country house on the Isle of Wight, where they raised two sons named Hallam and Lionel.

Tennyson continued to write and to gain popularity. His later poetry primarily followed a narrative rather than lyrical style; as the novel began to emerge as the most popular literary form, poets began searching for new ways of telling stories in verse. For example, in Tennyson's poem "Maud," a speaker tells his story in a sequence of short lyrics in varying meters; Tennyson described the work as an experimental "monodrama." Not only were his later verses concerned with dramatic fiction, they also examined current national political drama. As Poet Laureate, Tennyson represented the literary voice of the nation and, as such, he made occasional pronouncements on political affairs. For example, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854) described a disastrous battle in the Crimean War and praised the heroism of the British soldiers there. In 1859, Tennyson published the first four *Idylls of the King*, a group of twelve blank-verse narrative poems tracing the story of the legendary King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. This collection, dedicated to Prince Albert, enjoyed much popularity among the royal family, who saw Arthur's lengthy reign as a representation of Queen Victoria's 64-year rule (1837-1901).

In 1884, the Royals granted Tennyson a baronetcy; he was now known as Alfred, Lord Tennyson. He dedicated most of the last fifteen years of his life to writing a series of full-length dramas in blank verse, which, however, failed to excite any particular interest. In 1892, at the age of 83, he died of heart failure and was buried among his illustrious literary predecessors at Westminster Abbey. Although Tennyson was the most popular poet in England in his own day, he was often the target of mockery by his immediate successors, the Edwardians and Georgians of the early twentieth century. Today, however, many critics consider Tennyson to be the greatest poet of the Victorian Age; and he stands as one of the major innovators of lyric and metrical form in all of English poetry.

## The Lotos-eaters and Choric Song

### **Summary**

Odysseus tells his mariners to have courage, assuring them that they will soon reach the shore of their home. In the afternoon, they reach a land "in which it seemed always afternoon" because of the languid and peaceful atmosphere. The mariners sight this "land of streams" with its gleaming river flowing to the sea, its three snow-capped mountaintops, and its shadowy pine growing in the vale.

The mariners are greeted by the "mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters," whose dark faces appear pale against the rosy sunset. These Lotos-eaters come bearing the flower and fruit of the lotos, which they offer to Odysseus's mariners. Those who eat the lotos feel as if they have fallen into a deep sleep; they sit down upon the yellow sand of the island and can hardly perceive their fellow mariners speaking to them, hearing only the music of their heartbeat in their ears. Although it has been sweet to dream of their homes in Ithaca, the lotos makes them weary of wandering, preferring to linger here. One who has eaten of the lotos fruit proclaims that he will "return no more," and all of the mariners begin to sing about this resolution to remain in the land of the Lotos-eaters.

The rest of the poem consists of the eight numbered stanzas of the mariners' choric song, expressing their resolution to stay forever. First, they praise the sweet and soporific music of the land of the Lotos-eaters, comparing this music to petals, dew, granite, and tired eyelids. In the second stanza, they question why man is the only creature in nature who must toil. They argue that everything else in nature is able to rest and stay still, but man is tossed from one sorrow to another. Man's inner spirit tells him that tranquility and calmness offer the only joy, and yet he is fated to toil and wander his whole life.

In the third stanza, the mariners declare that everything in nature is allotted a lifespan in which to bloom and fade. As examples of other living things that die, they cite the "folded leaf, which eventually turns yellow and drifts to the earth, as well as the "full-juiced apple," which ultimately falls to the ground, and the flower, which ripens and fades. Next, in the fourth stanza, the mariners question the purpose of a life of labor, since nothing is cumulative and thus all our accomplishments lead nowhere. They question "what...will last," proclaiming that everything in life is fleeting and therefore futile. The mariners also express their desire for "long rest or death," either of which will free them from a life of endless labor.

The fifth stanza echoes the first stanza's positive appeal to luxurious self-indulgence; the mariners declare how sweet it is to live a life of continuous dreaming. They paint a picture of what it might be like to do nothing all day except sleep, dream, eat lotos, and watch the waves on the beach. Such an existence would enable them peacefully to remember all those individuals they once knew who are now either buried ("heaped over with a mound of grass") or cremated ("two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!").

In the sixth stanza, the mariners reason that their families have probably forgotten them anyway, and their homes fallen apart, so they might as well stay in the land of the Lotos-eaters and "let what is broken so remain." Although they have fond memories of their wives and sons, surely by now, after ten years of fighting in Troy, their sons have inherited their property; it will merely cause unnecessary confusion and disturbances for them to return now. Their hearts are worn out from fighting wars and navigating the seas by means of the constellations, and thus they prefer the relaxing death-like existence of the Land of the Lotos to the confusion that a return home would create.

In the seventh stanza, as in the first and fifth, the mariners bask in the pleasant sights and sounds of the island. They imagine how sweet it would be to lie on beds of flowers while watching the river flow and listening to the echoes in the caves. Finally, the poem closes with the mariners' vow to spend the rest of their lives relaxing and reclining in the "hollow Lotos land." They compare the life of abandon, which they will enjoy in Lotos land, to the carefree existence of the Gods, who could not care less about the famines, plagues, earthquakes, and other natural disasters that plague human beings on earth. These Gods simply smile upon men, who till the earth and harvest crops until they either suffer in hell or dwell in the "Elysian valleys" of heaven. Since they have concluded that "slumber is more sweet than toil," the mariners resolve to stop wandering the seas and to settle instead in the land of the Lotos-eaters.

## Form

This poem is divided into two parts: the first is a descriptive narrative (lines 1-45), and the second is a song of eight numbered stanzas of varying length (lines 46-173). The first part of the poem is written in nine-line Spenserian stanzas, so called because they were employed by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. The rhyme scheme of the Spenserian stanza is a closely interlinked ABABCBCC, with the first eight lines in iambic pentameter and the final line an Alexandrine (or line of six iambic feet). The choric song follows a far looser structure: both the line-length and the rhyme scheme vary widely among the eight stanzas.

## **Commentary**

This poem is based on the story of Odysseus's mariners described in scroll IX of Homer's *Odyssey*. Homer writes about a storm that blows the great hero's mariners off course as they attempt to journey back from Troy to their homes in Ithaca. They come to a land where people do nothing but eat lotos (the Greek for our English "lotus"), a flower so delicious that some of his men, upon tasting it, lose all desire to return to Ithaca and long only to remain in the Land of the Lotos. Odysseus must drag his men away so that they can resume their journey home. In this poem, Tennyson powerfully evokes the mariners' yearning to settle into a life of peacefulness, rest, and even death.

The poem draws not only on Homer's *Odyssey*, but also on the biblical Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis. In the Bible, a "life of toil" is Adam's punishment for partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: after succumbing to the temptation of the fruit, Adam is condemned to labor by the sweat of his brow. Yet in this poem, *fruit* (the lotos) provides a *release* from the life of labor, suggesting an inversion of the biblical story.

Tennyson provides a tempting and seductive vision of a life free from toil. His description of the Lotos Land rivals the images of pleasure in Milton's "L'Allegro" and Marvell's "The Garden." Yet his lush descriptive passages are accompanied by persuasive rhetoric; nearly every stanza of the choric song presents a different argument to justify the mariners' resolution to remain in the Lotos Land. For example, in the second stanza of the song the mariners express the irony of the fact that man, who is the pinnacle and apex of creation, is the only creature made to toil and labor all the days of his life. This stanza may also be read as a pointed inversion and overturning of Coleridge's "Work without Hope," in which the speaker laments that "all nature seems at work" while he alone remains unoccupied.

Although the taste of the lotos and the vision of life it offers is seductive, the poem suggests that the mariners may be deceiving themselves in succumbing to the hypnotic power of the flower. Partaking of the lotos involves abandoning external reality and living instead in a world of appearances, where everything "seems" to be but nothing actually is: the Lotos Land emerges as "a land where all things always seemed the same" (line 24). Indeed, the word "seems" recurs throughout the poem, and can be found in all but one of the opening five stanzas, suggesting that the Lotos Land is not so much a "land of streams" as a "land of seems." In addition, in the final stanza of the choric song, the poem describes the Lotos Land as a "hollow" land with "hollow" caves, indicating that the vision of the sailors is somehow empty and insubstantial.

The reader, too, is left with ambivalent feelings about the mariners' argument for lassitude. Although the thought of life without toil is certainly tempting, it is also deeply unsettling. The reader's discomfort with this notion arises in part from the knowledge of the broader context of the poem: Odysseus will ultimately drag his men away from the Lotos Land disapprovingly; moreover, his injunction to have "courage" opens--and then overshadows--the whole poem with a sense of moral opprobrium. The sailors' case for lassitude is further undermined morally by their complaint that it is unpleasant "to war with evil" (line 94); are they too lazy to do what is right? By choosing the Lotos Land, the mariners are abandoning the sources of substantive meaning in life and the potential for heroic accomplishment. Thus in this poem Tennyson forces us to consider the ambiguous appeal of a life without toil: although all of us share the longing for a carefree and relaxed existence, few people could truly be happy without any challenges to overcome, without the fire of aspiration and the struggle to make the world a better place.

## **Ulysses**

## **Summary**

Ulysses (Odysseus) declares that there is little point in his staying home "by this still hearth" with his old wife, doling out rewards and punishments for the unnamed masses who live in his kingdom.

Still speaking to himself he proclaims that he "cannot rest from travel" but feels compelled to live to the fullest and swallow every last drop of life. He has enjoyed all his experiences as a sailor who travels the seas, and he considers himself a symbol for everyone who wanders and roams the earth. His travels have exposed him to many different types of people and ways of living. They have also exposed him to the "delight of battle" while fighting the Trojan War with his men. Ulysses declares that his travels and encounters have shaped who he is: "I am a part of all that I have met," he asserts. And it is only when he is traveling that the "margin" of the globe that he has not yet traversed shrink and fade, and cease to goad him.

Ulysses declares that it is boring to stay in one place, and that to remain stationary is to rust rather than to shine; to stay in one place is to pretend that all there is to life is the simple act of breathing, whereas he knows that in fact life contains much novelty, and he longs to encounter this. His spirit yearns constantly for new experiences that will broaden his horizons; he wishes "to follow knowledge like a sinking star" and forever grow in wisdom and in learning.

Ulysses now speaks to an unidentified audience concerning his son Telemachus, who will act as his successor while the great hero resumes his travels: he says, "This is my son, mine own Telemachus, to whom I leave the scepter and the isle." He speaks highly but also patronizingly of his son's capabilities as a ruler, praising his prudence, dedication, and devotion to the gods. Telemachus will do his work of governing the island while Ulysses will do his work of traveling the seas: "He works his work, I mine."

In the final stanza, Ulysses addresses the mariners with whom he has worked, traveled, and weathered life's storms over many years. He declares that although he and they are old, they still have the potential to do something noble and honorable before "the long day wanes." He encourages them to make use of their old age because "'tis not too late to seek a newer world." He declares that his goal is to sail onward "beyond the sunset" until his death. Perhaps, he suggests, they may even reach the "Happy Isles," or the paradise of perpetual summer described in Greek mythology where great heroes like the warrior Achilles were believed to have been taken after their deaths. Although Ulysses and his mariners are not as strong as they were in youth, they are "strong in will" and are sustained by their resolve to push onward relentlessly: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

## **Form**

This poem is written as a dramatic monologue: the entire poem is spoken by a single character, whose identity is revealed by his own words. The lines are in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, which serves to impart a fluid and natural quality to Ulysses's speech. Many of the lines are enjambed, which means that a thought does not end with the line-break; the sentences often end in the middle, rather than the end, of the lines. The use of enjambment is appropriate in a poem about pushing forward "beyond the utmost bound of human thought." Finally, the poem is divided into four paragraph-like sections, each of which comprises a distinct thematic unit of the poem.

## **Commentary**

In this poem, written in 1833 and revised for publication in 1842, Tennyson reworks the figure of Ulysses by drawing on the ancient hero of Homer's *Odyssey* ("Ulysses" is the Roman form of the Greek "Odysseus") and the medieval hero of Dante's *Inferno*. Homer's Ulysses, as described in Scroll XI of the *Odyssey*, learns from a prophecy that he will take a

final sea voyage after killing the suitors of his wife Penelope. The details of this sea voyage are described by Dante in Canto XXVI of the *Inferno*: Ulysses finds himself restless in Ithaca and driven by "the longing I had to gain experience of the world." Dante's Ulysses is a tragic figure who dies while sailing too far in an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Tennyson combines these two accounts by having Ulysses make his speech shortly after returning to Ithaca and resuming his administrative responsibilities, and shortly before embarking on his final voyage.

However, this poem also concerns the poet's own personal journey, for it was composed in the first few weeks after Tennyson learned of the death of his dear college friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833. Like *In Memoriam*, then, this poem is also an elegy for a deeply cherished friend. Ulysses, who symbolizes the grieving poet, proclaims his resolution to push onward in spite of the awareness that "death closes all" (line 51). As Tennyson himself stated, the poem expresses his own "need of going forward and braving the struggle of life" after the loss of his beloved Hallam.

The poem's final line, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," came to serve as a motto for the poet's Victorian contemporaries: the poem's hero longs to flee the tedium of daily life "among these barren crags" (line 2) and to enter a mythical dimension "beyond the sunset, and the baths of all the western stars" (lines 60-61); as such, he was a model of individual self-assertion and the Romantic rebellion against bourgeois conformity. Thus for Tennyson's immediate audience, the figure of Ulysses held not only mythological meaning, but stood as an important contemporary cultural icon as well.

"Ulysses," like many of Tennyson's other poems, deals with the desire to reach beyond the limits of one's field of vision and the mundane details of everyday life. Ulysses is the antithesis of the mariners in "The Lotos-Eaters," who proclaim "we will no longer roam" and desire only to relax amidst the Lotos fields. In contrast, Ulysses "cannot rest from travel" and longs to roam the globe (line 6). Like the Lady of Shallot, who longs for the worldly experiences she has been denied, Ulysses hungers to explore the untraveled world.

As in all dramatic monologues, here the character of the speaker emerges almost unintentionally from his own words. Ulysses' incompetence as a ruler is evidenced by his preference for potential quests rather than his present responsibilities. He devotes a full 26 lines to his own egotistical proclamation of his zeal for the wandering life, and another 26 lines to the exhortation of his mariners to roam the seas with him. However, he offers only 11 lines of lukewarm praise to his son concerning the governance of the kingdom in his absence, and a mere two words about his "aged wife" Penelope. Thus, the speaker's own words betray his abdication of responsibility and his specificity of purpose.

## Tithonus

### **Summary**

The woods in the forests grow old and their leaves fall to the ground. Man is born, works the earth, and then dies and is buried underground. Yet the speaker, Tithonus, is cursed to live forever. Tithonus tells Aurora, goddess of the dawn, that he grows old slowly in her arms like a "white-hair'd shadow" roaming in the east.

Tithonus laments that while he is now a "gray shadow" he was once a beautiful man chosen as Aurora's lover. He remembers that he long ago asked Aurora to grant him eternal life: "Give me immortality!" Aurora granted his wish generously, like a rich philanthropist who has so much money that he gives charity without thinking twice. However, the Hours, the goddesses who accompany Aurora, were angry that Tithonus was able to resist death, so they took their revenge by battering him until he grew old and withered. Now, though he cannot die, he remains forever old; and he must dwell in the presence of Aurora, who renews herself each morning and is thus forever young. Tithonus

appeals to Aurora to take back the gift of immortality while the "silver star" of Venus rises in the morning. He now realizes the ruin in desiring to be different from all the rest of mankind and in living beyond the "goal of ordinance," the normal human lifespan.

Just before the sun rises, Tithonus catches sight of the "dark world" where he was born a mortal. He witnesses the coming of Aurora, the dawn: her cheek begins to turn red and her eyes grow so bright that they overpower the light of the stars. Aurora's team of horses awakes and converts the twilight into fire. The poet now addresses Aurora, telling her that she always grows beautiful and then leaves before she can answer his request. He questions why she must "scare" him with her tearful look of silent regret; her look makes him fear that an old saying might be true--that "The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts."

Tithonus sighs and remembers his youth long ago, when he would watch the arrival of the dawn and feel his whole body come alive as he lay down and enjoyed the kisses of another. This lover from his youth used to whisper to him "wild and sweet" melodies, like the music of Apollo's lyre, which accompanied the construction of Ilion (Troy).

Tithonus asks Aurora not to keep him imprisoned in the east where she rises anew each morning, because his eternal old age contrasts so painfully with her eternal renewal. He cringes cold and wrinkled, whereas she rises each morning to warm "happy men that have the power to die" and men who are already dead in their burial mounds ("grassy barrows"). Tithonus asks Aurora to release him and let him die. This way, she can see his grave when she rises and he, buried in the earth, will be able to forget the emptiness of his present state, and her return "on silver wheels" that stings him each morning.

## Form

This poem is a dramatic monologue: the entire text is spoken by a single character whose words reveal his identity. The lines take the form of blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter). The poem as a whole falls into seven paragraph-like sections of varying length, each of which forms a thematic unit unto itself.

## Commentary

Like Ulysses, Tithonus is a figure from Greek mythology whom Tennyson takes as a speaker in one of his dramatic monologues (see the section on "Ulysses"). According to myth, Tithonus is the brother of Priam, King of Troy, and was loved by Aurora, the immortal goddess of the dawn, who had a habit of carrying off the beautiful young men whom she fancied. Aurora abducted Tithonus and asked Zeus to grant him immortality, which Zeus did. However, she forgot to ask that he also grant eternal youth, so Tithonus soon became a decrepit old man who could not die. Aurora finally transformed him into a grasshopper to relieve him of his sad existence. In this poem, Tennyson slightly alters the mythological story: here, it is Tithonus, not Aurora, who asks for immortality, and it is Aurora, not Zeus, who confers this gift upon him. The source of suffering in the poem is not Aurora's forgetfulness in formulating her request to Zeus, but rather the goddesses referred to as "strong Hours" who resent Tithonus's immortality and subject him to the ravages of time.

Tennyson wrote the first version of this poem as "Tithon" in 1833, and then completed the final version for publication in 1859 in the *Cornhill Magazine* edited by William Makepeace Thackeray. The 1833 version contained several significant differences from the version we know today: the poem began not with a repetition but with the lament "Ay me! ay me! The woods decay and fall"; the "swan," which here dies after many summers was not a swan but a "rose"; and immortality was described as "fatal" rather than "cruel."

The 1833 poem was initially conceived as a pendant, or companion poem, to "Ulysses." "Ulysses" alludes to the danger that fulfillment may bring--"It may be that the gulfs will wash us down"; "Tithonus" represents the realization of this danger. For the character of Tithonus achieves that which Ulysses longs for and finds himself bitterly disappointed: Ulysses wanted to sail "beyond the sunset" because he sensed "how dull it is to pause"; Tithonus, in contrast, questions why any man should want "to pass beyond the goal of ordinance where all should pause" (lines 30-31). "Tithonus" thus serves as an appropriate thematic follow-up to "Ulysses."

This poem was one of a set of four works (also including "Morte d'Arthur," "Ulysses," and "Tiresias") that Tennyson wrote shortly after Arthur Henry Hallam's death in 1833. Whereas Hallam was granted youth without immortality, Tithonus is granted immortality without youth. Tennyson developed the idea for a poem about these themes of age and mortality after hearing a remark by Emily Sellwood, Tennyson's fiancée: Sellwood lamented that unlike the Hallams, "None of the Tennysons ever die." Appropriately, in depicting the futility of eternal life without youth, Tennyson drew upon a timeless figure: the figure of Tithonus is eternally old because he lives on forever as an old man in the popular imagination.

### **Godiva**

The poem was written in 1840 when Tennyson was returning from Coventry to London, after his visit to Warwickshire in that year. The Godiva pageant takes place in that town at the great fair on Friday in Trinity week. Earl Leofric was the Lord of Coventry in the reign of Edward the Confessor, and he and his wife Godiva founded a magnificent Benedictine monastery at Coventry. The first writer who mentions this legend is Matthew of Westminster, who wrote in 1307, that is some 250 years after Leofric's time, and what authority he had for it is not known. It is certainly not mentioned by the many preceding writers who have left accounts of Leofric and Godiva (see Gough's edition of Camden's 'Britannia', vol. ii., p. 346, and for a full account of the legend see W. Reader, 'The History and Description of Coventry Show Fair, with the History of Leofric and Godiva'). With Tennyson's should be compared Moultrie's beautiful poem on the same subject, and Landor's Imaginary Conversation between Leofric and Godiva.

### **The Lady of Shallot**

#### **Summary**

Part I: The poem begins with a description of a river and a road that pass through long fields of barley and rye before reaching the town of Camelot. The people of the town travel along the road and look toward an island called Shalott, which lies further down the river. The island of Shalott contains several plants and flowers, including lilies, aspens, and willows. On the island, a woman known as the Lady of Shalott is imprisoned within a building made of "four gray walls and four gray towers."

Both "heavy barges" and light open boats sail along the edge of the river to Camelot. But has anyone seen or heard of the lady who lives on the island in the river? Only the reapers who harvest the barley hear the echo of her singing. At night, the tired reaper listens to her singing and whispers that he hears her: "'Tis the fairy Lady of Shalott."

Part II: The Lady of Shalott weaves a magic, colorful web. She has heard a voice whisper that a curse will befall her if she looks down to Camelot, and she does not know what this curse would be. Thus, she concentrates solely on her weaving, never lifting her eyes.

However, as she weaves, a mirror hangs before her. In the mirror, she sees "shadows of the world," including the highway road, which also passes through the fields, the eddies in the river, and the peasants of the town. Occasionally, she also sees a group of damsels, an abbot (church official), a young shepherd, or a page dressed in crimson. She sometimes

sights a pair of knights riding by, though she has no loyal knight of her own to court her. Nonetheless, she enjoys her solitary weaving, though she expresses frustration with the world of shadows when she glimpses a funeral procession or a pair of newlyweds in the mirror.

Part III: A knight in brass armor ("brazen greaves") comes riding through the fields of barley beside Shalott; the sun shines on his armor and makes it sparkle. As he rides, the gems on his horse's bridle glitter like a constellation of stars, and the bells on the bridle ring. The knight hangs a bugle from his sash, and his armor makes ringing noises as he gallops alongside the remote island of Shalott.

In the "blue, unclouded weather," the jewels on the knight's saddle shine, making him look like a meteor in the purple sky. His forehead glows in the sunlight, and his black curly hair flows out from under his helmet. As he passes by the river, his image flashes into the Lady of Shalott's mirror and he sings out "tirra lirra." Upon seeing and hearing this knight, the Lady stops weaving her web and abandons her loom. The web flies out from the loom, and the mirror cracks, and the Lady announces the arrival of her doom: "The curse is come upon me."

Part IV: As the sky breaks out in rain and storm, the Lady of Shalott descends from her tower and finds a boat. She writes the words "The Lady of Shalott" around the boat's bow and looks downstream to Camelot like a prophet foreseeing his own misfortunes. In the evening, she lies down in the boat, and the stream carries her to Camelot.

The Lady of Shalott wears a snowy white robe and sings her last song as she sails down to Camelot. She sings until her blood freezes, her eyes darken, and she dies. When her boat sails silently into Camelot, all the knights, lords, and ladies of Camelot emerge from their halls to behold the sight. They read her name on the bow and "cross...themselves for fear." Only the great knight Lancelot is bold enough to push aside the crowd, look closely at the dead maiden, and remark "She has a lovely face; God in his mercy lend her grace."

## Form

The poem is divided into four numbered parts with discrete, isometric (equally-long) stanzas. The first two parts contain four stanzas each, while the last two parts contain five. Each of the four parts ends at the moment when description yields to directly quoted speech: this speech first takes the form of the reaper's whispering identification, then of the Lady's half-sick lament, then of the Lady's pronouncement of her doom, and finally, of Lancelot's blessing. Each stanza contains nine lines with the rhyme scheme AAAABCCCB. The "B" always stands for "Camelot" in the fifth line and for "Shalott" in the ninth. The "A" and "C" lines are always in tetrameter, while the "B" lines are in trimeter. In addition, the syntax is line-bound: most phrases do not extend past the length of a single line.

## Commentary

Originally written in 1832, this poem was later revised, and published in its final form in 1842. Tennyson claimed that he had based it on an old Italian romance, though the poem also bears much similarity to the story of the Maid of Astolat in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. As in Malory's account, Tennyson's lyric includes references to the Arthurian legend; moreover, "Shalott" seems quite close to Malory's "Astolat."

Much of the poem's charm stems from its sense of mystery and elusiveness; of course, these aspects also complicate the task of analysis. That said, most scholars understand "The Lady of Shalott" to be about the conflict between art and life. The Lady, who weaves her magic web and sings her song in a remote tower, can be seen to represent the contemplative artist isolated from the bustle and activity of daily life. The moment she sets

her art aside to gaze down on the real world, a curse befalls her and she meets her tragic death. The poem thus captures the conflict between an artist's desire for social involvement and his/her doubts about whether such a commitment is viable for someone dedicated to art. The poem may also express a more personal dilemma for Tennyson as a specific artist: while he felt an obligation to seek subject matter outside the world of his own mind and his own immediate experiences--to comment on politics, history, or a more general humanity--he also feared that this expansion into broader territories might destroy his poetry's magic.

Part I and Part IV of this poem deal with the Lady of Shalott as she appears to the outside world, whereas Part II and Part III describe the world from the Lady's perspective. In Part I, Tennyson portrays the Lady as secluded from the rest of the world by both water and the height of her tower. We are not told how she spends her time or what she thinks about; thus we, too, like everyone in the poem, are denied access to the interiority of her world. Interestingly, the only people who know that she exists are those whose occupations are most diametrically opposite her own: the reapers who toil in physical labor rather than by sitting and crafting works of beauty.

Part II describes the Lady's experience of imprisonment from her own perspective. We learn that her alienation results from a mysterious curse: she is not allowed to look out on Camelot, so all her knowledge of the world must come from the reflections and shadows in her mirror. (It was common for weavers to use mirrors to see the progress of their tapestries from the side that would eventually be displayed to the viewer.) Tennyson notes that often she sees a funeral or a wedding, a disjunction that suggests the interchangeability, and hence the conflation, of love and death for the Lady: indeed, when she later falls in love with Lancelot, she will simultaneously bring upon her own death.

Whereas Part II makes reference to all the different types of people that the Lady sees through her mirror, including the knights who "come riding two and two" (line 61), Part III focuses on one particular knight who captures the Lady's attention: Sir Lancelot. This dazzling knight is the hero of the King Arthur stories, famous for his illicit affair with the beautiful Queen Guinevere. He is described in an array of colors: he is a "red-cross knight"; his shield "sparkled on the yellow field"; he wears a "silver bugle"; he passes through "blue unclouded weather" and the "purple night," and he has "coal-black curls." He is also adorned in a "gemmy bridle" and other bejeweled garments, which sparkle in the light. Yet in spite of the rich visual details that Tennyson provides, it is the sound and not the sight of Lancelot that causes the Lady of Shalott to transgress her set boundaries: only when she hears him sing "Tirra lirra" does she leave her web and seal her doom. The intensification of the Lady's experiences in this part of the poem is marked by the shift from the static, descriptive present tense of Parts I and II to the dynamic, active past of Parts III and IV.

In Part IV, all the lush color of the previous section gives way to "pale yellow" and "darkened" eyes, and the brilliance of the sunlight is replaced by a "low sky raining." The moment the Lady sets her art aside to look upon Lancelot, she is seized with death. The end of her artistic isolation thus leads to the end of creativity: "Out flew her web and floated wide" (line 114). She also loses her mirror, which had been her only access to the outside world: "The mirror cracked from side to side" (line 115). Her turn to the outside world thus leaves her bereft both of her art object and of the instrument of her craft--and of her very life. Yet perhaps the greatest curse of all is that although she surrenders herself to the sight of Lancelot, she dies completely unappreciated by him. The poem ends with the tragic triviality of Lancelot's response to her tremendous passion: all he has to say about her is that "she has a lovely face" (line 169). Having abandoned her artistry, the Lady of Shalott becomes herself an art object; no longer can she offer her creativity, but merely a "dead-pale" beauty (line 157).

**Mariana**

## Summary

This poem begins with the description of an abandoned farmhouse, or grange, in which the flower-pots are covered in overgrown moss and an ornamental pear tree hangs from rusty nails on the wall. The sheds stand abandoned and broken, and the straw ("thatch") covering the roof of the farmhouse is worn and full of weeds. A woman, presumably standing in the vicinity of the farmhouse, is described in a four-line refrain that recurs--with slight modifications--as the last lines of each of the poem's stanzas: "She only said, 'My life is dreary / He cometh not,' she said; / She said, 'I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!'"

The woman's tears fall with the dew in the evening and then fall again in the morning, before the dew has dispersed. In both the morning and the evening, she is unable to look to the "sweet heaven." At night, when the bats have come and gone, and the sky is dark, she opens her window curtain and looks out at the expanse of land. She comments that "The night is dreary" and repeats her death-wish refrain.

In the middle of the night, the woman wakes up to the sound of the crow, and stays up until the cock calls out an hour before dawn. She hears the lowing of the oxen and seemingly walks in her sleep until the cold winds of the morning come. She repeats the death-wish refrain exactly as in the first stanza, except that this time it is "the day" and not "my life" that is dreary.

Within a stone's throw from the wall lies an artificial passage for water filled with black waters and lumps of moss. A silver-green poplar tree shakes back and forth and serves as the only break in an otherwise flat, level, gray landscape. The woman repeats the refrain of the first stanza.

When the moon lies low at night, the woman looks to her white window curtain, where she sees the shadow of the poplar swaying in the wind. But when the moon is very low and the winds exceptionally strong, the shadow of the poplar falls not on the curtain but on her bed and across her forehead. The woman says that "the night is dreary" and wishes once again that she were dead.

During the day, the doors creak on their hinges, the fly sings in the window pane, and the mouse cries out or peers from behind the lining of the wall. The farmhouse is haunted by old faces, old footsteps, and old voices, and the woman repeats the refrain exactly as it appears in the first and fourth stanzas.

The woman is confused and disturbed by the sounds of the sparrow chirping on the roof, the clock ticking slowly, and the wind blowing through the poplar. Most of all, she hates the early evening hour when the sun begins to set and a sunbeam lies across her bed chamber. The woman recites an emphatic variation on the death-wish refrain; now it is not "the day," or even her "life" that is dreary; rather, we read: "Then said she, 'I am very dreary, / He will not come,' she said; / She wept, "I am aweary, aweary,/ Oh God, that I were dead!"

## Form

"Mariana" takes the form of seven twelve-line stanzas, each of which is divided into three four-line rhyme units according to the pattern *ABAB CDDC EFEF*. The lines ending in *E* and *F* remain essentially the same in every stanza and thus serve as a bewitching, chant-like refrain throughout the poem. All of the poem's lines fall into iambic tetrameter, with the exception of the trimeter of the tenth and twelfth lines.

## Commentary

The subject of this poem is drawn from a line in Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure*: "Mariana in the moated grange." This line describes a young woman waiting for her lover Angelo, who has abandoned her upon the loss of her dowry. Just as the epigraph from Shakespeare contains no verb, the poem, too, lacks all action or narrative movement. Instead, the entire poem serves as an extended visual depiction of melancholy isolation.

One of the most important symbols in the poem is the poplar tree described in the fourth and fifth stanzas. On one level, the poplar can be interpreted as a sort of phallic symbol: it provides the only break in an otherwise flat and even landscape ("For leagues no other tree did mark / the level waste" [lines 43-44]); and the shadow of the poplar falls on Mariana's bed when she is lovesick at night, suggesting her sexual hunger for the absent lover. On another level, however, the poplar is an important image from classical mythology: in his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes how Oenone, deserted by Paris, addresses the poplar on which Paris has carved his promise not to desert her. Thus the poplar has come to stand as a classic symbol of the renegade lover and his broken promise.

The first, fourth, and sixth stanzas can be grouped together, not only because they all share the exact same refrain, but also because they are the only stanzas that take place in the daytime. In themselves, each of these stanzas portrays an unending present without any sense of the passage of time or the play of light and darkness. These stanzas alternate with the descriptions of forlorn and restless nights in which Mariana neither sleeps nor wakes but inhabits a dreamy, in-between state: Mariana cries in the morning and evening alike (lines 13-14) and awakens in the middle of the night (lines 25-26); sleeping and waking meld. The effect of this alternation between flat day and sleepless night is to create a sense of a tormented, confused time, unordered by patterns of natural cycles of life.

Even though the poem as a whole involves no action or progression, it nonetheless reaches a sort of climax in the final stanza. This stanza begins with a triple subject (chirrup, ticking, sound), which creates a mounting intensity as the verb is pushed farther back into the sentence. The predicate, "did all confound / Her sense" (lines 76-77), is enjambed over two lines, thereby enacting the very confounding of sense that it describes: both Mariana's mind and the logic of the sentence become confused, for at first it seems that the object of "confound" is "all." This predicate is then followed by a caesura and then the sudden, active force of the climactic superlative phrase "but most she loathed." At this point, the setting shifts again to the early evening as the recurrent cycle of day and night once more enacts Mariana's alternating hope and disappointment. The stanza ends with a dramatic yet subtle shift in the refrain from "He cometh not" to the decisive and peremptory "He will not come."

The refrain of the poem functions like an incantation, which contributes to the atmosphere of enchantment. The abandoned grange seems to be under a spell or curse; Mariana is locked in a state of perpetual, introverted brooding. Her consciousness paces a cell of melancholy; she can perceive the world only through her dejection. Thus, all of the poet's descriptions of the physical world serve as primarily psychological categories; it is not the grange, but the person, who has been abandoned--so, too, has this woman's mind been abandoned by her sense. This is an example of the "pathetic fallacy." Coined by the nineteenth-century writer John Ruskin, this phrase refers to our tendency to attribute our emotional and psychological states to the natural world. Thus, because Mariana is so forlorn, her farmhouse, too, although obviously incapable of emotion, seems dejected, depressed; when the narrator describes her walls he is seeing not the indifferent white of the paint, but rather focuses on the dark shadows there. While Ruskin considered the excessive use of the fallacy to be the mark of an inferior poet, later poets (such as T.S.

Eliot and Ezra Pound) would use the pathetic fallacy liberally and to great effect. Arguably, Tennyson here also uses the method to create great emotional force.

## Christina Rossetti

Rossetti was born in London and educated at home by her mother. Her siblings were the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, and Maria Francesca Rossetti. Their father, Gabriele Rossetti, was an Italian poet and a political asylum seeker from Naples; their mother, Frances Polidori, was the sister of Lord Byron's friend and physician, John William Polidori. In the 1840s her family was stricken with severe financial difficulties due to the deterioration of her father's physical and mental health. When she was 14, Rossetti suffered a nervous breakdown and left school.

Her breakdown was followed by bouts of depression and related illness. During this period she, her mother, and her sister became seriously interested in the Anglo-Catholic movement that was part of the Church of England. This religious devotion played a major role in Rossetti's personal life: in her late teens she became engaged to the painter James Collinson but this ended because he reverted to Catholicism; later she became involved with the linguist Charles Cayley but did not marry him, also for religious reasons. She was a volunteer worker from 1859 to 1870 at the St Mary Magdalene "house of charity" in Highgate, a refuge for former prostitutes.

Rossetti began writing at age 7 but she was 31 before her first work was published — *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). The collection garnered much critical praise and, according to Jan Marsh, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's death two months later led to Rossetti being hailed as her natural successor as 'female laureate'." The title poem from this book is one of Rossetti's best known works and, although at first glance it may seem merely to be a nursery rhyme about two sisters' misadventures with goblins, the poem is multi-layered, challenging, and complex. Critics have interpreted the piece in a variety of ways: seeing it as an allegory about temptation and salvation; a commentary on Victorian gender roles and female agency; and a work about erotic desire and social redemption. Some readers have noted its likeness to Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" given both poems' religious themes of temptation, sin and redemption by vicarious suffering.

Her Christmas poem "In the Bleak Midwinter" became widely known after her death when set as a Christmas carol by Gustav Holst as well as by other composers.

Rossetti continued to write and publish for the rest of her life although she focused primarily on devotional writing and children's poetry. She maintained a large circle of friends and for ten years volunteered at a home for prostitutes. She was ambivalent about women's suffrage but many scholars have identified feminist themes in her poetry. Furthermore, as Marsh notes, "she was opposed to war, slavery (in the American South), cruelty to animals (in the prevalent practice of animal experimentation), the exploitation of girls in under-age prostitution and all forms of military aggression."

In the later decades of her life, Rossetti suffered from Graves Disease. In 1893 she developed cancer, and died the following year 29 December 1894; she is buried in Highgate Cemetery. In the early 20th century Rossetti's popularity faded as many respected Victorian writers' reputations suffered from Modernism's backlash. Rossetti remained largely unnoticed and unread until the 1970s when feminist scholars began to



recover and comment on her work. In the last few decades Rossetti's writing has been rediscovered and she has regained admittance into the Victorian literary canon.

## Goblin Market

### Plot

*Goblin Market* is about two close sisters, Laura and Lizzie, as well as the goblin men to whom the title refers, and another girl named Jeanie.

Although the sisters seem to be quite young, they live by themselves in a house, and are accustomed to draw water every evening from a stream. As the poem begins, twilight is falling, and as usual the sisters hear the calls from the Goblin merchants, who sell fruits in fantastic abundance, variety and savor. On this evening, Laura lingers at the stream after her sister has left for home. Wanting fruit but having no money, the impulsive Laura offers a lock of her hair and "a tear more rare than pearl."

Laura gorges on the delicious fruit in a sort of bacchic frenzy, then comes to her senses and, after picking up one of the seeds, returns home. Lizzie, waiting at home, and "full of wise upbraidings," reminds Laura about the cautionary tale of Jeanie, another girl who, having likewise partaken of the goblin men's fruits, sadly died just at the beginning of winter, after a long decline.

Night has by then fallen, and the sisters go to sleep in their shared bed.

The next day, as Laura and Lizzie go about their work in the house, Laura dreamily longs for the coming evening's meeting with the goblin men. But at the stream that evening, as she strains to hear the usual goblin chants and cries, Laura discovers to her horror that, although Lizzie still hears the goblins' voices, she no longer can.

Unable to buy more of the forbidden fruit, pining away for the lack of it, Laura falls into a slow physical deterioration and depression. As winter approaches, Laura pines away and no longer does her household work. One day she remembers the saved seed and plants it, but it bears nothing.

Weeks and months pass, and finally sister Lizzie realizes that Laura is on the verge of death. Lizzie resolves to visit the goblin men to buy some of their fruit, hoping thereby to soothe Laura's pain. Carrying a silver penny, Lizzie goes down to the brook and is greeted in a friendly way by the goblins. But their attitudes turn malicious when they realize Lizzie wants to pay with mere money, and to carry the fruits home with her. Enraged, the goblins pummel and assault Lizzie, trying to make her eat the fruits. In the process, the goblins drench the brave girl in fruit juice and pulp.

Lizzie escapes to run home, hoping that Laura will eat and drink the juice from her body. The weakened sister does so, then undergoes a violent transformation of such intensity that her life seems to hang in the balance.

The next morning, though, Laura has returned to her old self, both physically and mentally. As the last stanza attests, both Laura and Lizzie live to tell their children of the evils of the goblins' fruits – and the awesome powers of sisterly love.

### Criticism

Since the 1970s, critics have tended to view *Goblin Market* as an expression of Rossetti's feminist (or proto-feminist) politics. Most critics agree that the poem is about feminine sexuality and its relation to Victorian social mores. In addition to its clear allusions to Adam

and Eve, forbidden fruit, and temptation, there is much in the poem that seems overtly sexual, such as when Lizzie, going to buy fruit from the goblins, considers her dead friend Jeanie, "Who should have been a bride; / But who for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died", and lines like "Lizzie uttered not a word;/ Would not open lip from lip/ Lest they should cram a mouthful in;/ But laughed in heart to feel the drip/ Of juice that syruped all her face,/ And lodged in dimples of her chin,/ And streaked her neck which quaked like curd."

The poem's attitude toward this temptation seems ambiguous, since the happy ending offers the possibility of redemption for Laura, while typical Victorian portrayals of the "fallen woman" ended in the fallen woman's death. It is worth noting that although the historical record is lacking, Rossetti apparently began working at Highgate Penitentiary for fallen women shortly after composing "Goblin Market" in the spring of 1859.

According to Antony Harrison of North Carolina State University, Jerome McGann reads the poem as a criticism of Victorian marriage markets and conveys "the need for an alternative social order". For Sandra Gilbert, the fruit represents Victorian women's exclusion from the world of art.<sup>[1]</sup> Other scholars – most notably Herbert Tucker – view the poem as a critique on the rise of advertising in precapitalist England, with the goblins utilising clever marketing tactics to seduce. Laura J. Hartman, among others, has pointed out the parallels between Laura's experience and the experience of drug addiction.

The poem uses an irregular rhyme scheme, often using couplets or ABAB rhymes, but also repeating some rhymes many times in succession, or allowing long gaps between a word and its partner. The meter is also irregular, typically (though not always) keeping four or five stresses per line. The lines below show the varied stress patterns, as well as an interior rhyme (grey/decay) picked up by the end-rhyme with "away". The initial line quoted here, "bright", rhymes with "night" a full seven lines earlier.

But when the noon waxed bright  
Her hair grew thin and grey;  
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn  
To swift decay, and burn  
Her fire away.

### **Jessie Cameron**

Jessie Cameron is a poem about the story of a girl who is propositioned by a young man but rejects him. The young man is the son of a "witch" and referred to as being of gypsy descent. Jessie is an outspoken girl, and turns this man down even after he tells her of his undying love for her on the basis that "he may be right for others" but not for her.

The poem ends tragically- both Jessie and her lover disappear into the sea and cries are heard as echoes forever more. Nobody knows whether the young man threw his life away or whether he lost it... hints at his sorcerous background.

### **Maude Clare**

"Maude Clare," by Christina Rossetti, deals differently with the common Pre-Raphaelite theme of tragic love than do contemporary members of the PRB. While Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poems infuse love with elements of tragedy through the introduction of death, Christina Rossetti's work, 'Maude Clare" deals with a more complex form of tragic love. As Lord Thomas's previous love, Maude Clare's presence sullies the nuptials between Nell and him, adding conflict to the wedding day occasion. Neither bride nor groom experience pure joy during the occasion because of Maude Clare's conspicuous attendance:

My lord was pale with inward strife,  
And Nell was pale with pride;

Rather than using flowery description or hard-edged realism, like her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti primarily composes her narrative poem of dialogue. Her unusual preponderance of dialogue with little attention to description of the environment gives the reader a sense of watching a scene in a play, rather than reading a poem.

Instead of stealing the focus of the wedding day, as one would traditionally expect, the bride forfeits all the attention to Maude Clare. A former lover (perhaps a very recent lover) of Lord Thomas, Maude usurps the reader's attention as the focal point of the narrative at the outset of the first stanza:

Out of the church she followed them  
With a lofty step and mien:  
His Bride was like a village maid,  
Maude Clare was like a queen.

Rossetti continues to contrast Maude Clare and the bride throughout the poem. Nell serves as a secondary character, speaking only in retaliation to Maude Clare's non-too-well masked jabs, and pales, literally and figuratively, in comparison to Maude Clare's stature and personage. As an ironic wedding gift, Maude Clare offers Thomas and Nell both physical amulets of love like "half of the golden chain" that Thomas wore, as well as a more biting gift of her "share of a fickle heart." Though Rossetti doesn't specifically delineate the exact circumstances that lead to this uncomfortably awkward and emotionally charged wedding scene, she highlights the profound tension between Maude Clare and Nell. Furthermore, Lord Thomas struggles to reconcile his marital vows and obligations to Nell with Maude Clare, the "More wise, and much more fair" other woman. Maude Clare claims that she has washed her hands of Thomas and that Nell can have his heart, which lacks "bloom" or "dew", implying that it has somehow lost its sparkle. The tone of her words and her conspicuous domination of the scene reveal her true, somewhat bitter attachments, however. In the end when, in a curt exchange of dialogue, the two women shoot venom-charged words at one another, Nell's retaliation concludes the poem. The interchange reminds us of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when, while fighting over Lysander's affections, Helena attacks Hermia by calling her a puppet, prompting the deterioration of the argument into a clawing, biting, physical confrontation:

"Yea, tho' you're taller by the head,  
More wise, and much more fair;  
I'll love him till he loves me best,  
Me best of all, Maude Clare."

Though not the blushing, bubbling bride that one might stereotypically expect, Nell gets the last word, but not the last thought. Rossetti's choice to emphasize Maude Clare's name in the finale leaves the reader to ponder the impending doom of Thomas and Nell's marriage. With the looming presence of Maude Clare at their wedding, acting as a bad omen for the marriage in general, it's unlikely that Thomas will ever love Nell the best, as she hopes. The tragedy lies not in a spiritual love lost by means of mortality, but instead in the interplay of a love triangle that leaves all parties unsatisfied, confused, and still longing for an ill-manifested vision of love.

**Winter: My Secret**

There have typically been two main interpretations of the secret. One is that it is sexual in nature. Rossetti has an interesting history when it comes to the subject of men and marriage; we talked last time about how twice in her life—once with James Collinson and again with Charles Cayley (incidentally a relationship that begins approximately the same time that this poem is written)—Rossetti goes through relationships that suddenly break off. Some critics have suggested that the "secret" in this poem is an early expression of a love and perhaps even a sexual attraction to Charles Cayley that has not yet progressed to the point that it can be spoken. Even if we move away from the biographical interpretation of the poem, there are certain things that lend themselves to such a reading. Note particularly line 23-34—these lines follow the description of winter as being a cold, barren time. We move from this empty, bleak time into spring, but the speaker refuses to tell her secret even then because of fear that something may kill it. The only time when she *might* tell her secret is in the summer. Be sure to note the language here which should take us back to Keatsian sensual pleasure! It's in the summer, when everything has blossomed and come to fruition that the secret can (possibly) be spoken, suggesting that the speaker must progress in the relationship to a certain point (and this is reading the relationship between the speaker and the auditor as the relationship that is developing).

An alternative take on this, however, is that the secret is simply knowledge of the speaker. If we think about relationships (think back to Goblin Market), knowledge about someone becomes a way of possessing them. A secret, by definition, is withholding knowledge. Thus for the speaker of the poem to withhold knowledge about herself from the auditor—whether that be someone within the poem or us as readers as the last line implies—is to assert power over the auditor. This reading emphasizes the second word of the title; it is MY secret as opposed to ours or yours.

Whether the emphasis is on the secret (and the sexual nature of the secret) or on the possession of the secret, either way, CR asserts that we cannot know. We can't pigeon hole, interpret the poem in a single right way. The secret is that the poem is open to multiple readings, many ways of looking at things. We see an interesting contrast to this in "In an Artist's Studio" where the speaker accuses the artist of having tried to possess the subject of his art in an almost vampiric way.

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Such poems sometimes appropriately reveal her ability to be playful and ironically detached, to parody the kinds of issues her poetry raises. Such is the case in a poem like "Winter: My Secret." In it the speaker confesses to wearing masks:

We find the clue to understanding this enigmatic poem in its self-parodic tone. The extraordinary fact here is that the work builds a thoroughly engaging relationship between the speaker and reader out of nothing substantial. No events transpire or are described, and even the "secret" has no extrinsic reference. The reader's curiosity and affection for the speaker are generated entirely by means of a fictive enigma that compels our interest. The poem thus becomes a commentary upon itself, upon the "secret" power of art. It also becomes, on an admittedly small scale, an exemplification of artistic perfection, a self-sufficing artifact. That such may be its design is indicated by the clear allusions, in the first three lines of the last stanza, to Keats's odes "To a Nightingale" and "To Autumn," both of which are concerned with acts of poetic creativity and the acceptance of created beauty (whether imaginative or natural) for its own sake.

Like many of Rossetti's poems, "Winter: My Secret" skillfully indulges in linguistic, formal, and metaphorical play. Such works by her are often unsettling because of their self-conscious experimentation and their aesthetic as well as substantive challenges to convention. Yet, unlike "Winter: My Secret," these works frequently close in conventionally

settled ways — with the thematic, dramatic, or psychological tensions resolved. Closure, however, very often embodies a literal resignation of the rebelliousness of language, themes, and characterization within the works, a giving over of the potential evoked in the poems for destabilizing the conventional world (of language, social expectations, literary conventions) in which the poems are usually set.

### **Tasks to complete to revise your set texts**

1. Write a chapter summary and brief notes under the six narrative headings for each key chapter of both of your novels.
2. Write a summary of each poem and brief notes under the six narrative headings you have studied.
3. Complete the grid to compare all 4 texts at once.

### **Now the really dull part, the exam itself**

The exam you are going to sit is in two sections. Each section lasts for 1 hour. Yes mathematicians, that means the exam is 2 hours long.

The exam is designed to focus on four assessment objectives. These are as follows:

**AO1** – Articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression

*In other words, how well you can write and structure an argument*

**AO2** - Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts

*In other words, closely analyse the use of form, structure and language in the text(s) you are writing about*

**AO3** - Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts, informed by interpretations of other readers

*In other words, how texts compare to one another, and how you interpret the texts*

**AO4** - Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received

*In other words, the context in which the text was written and received*

Each section of the exam specifically targets particular assessment objectives, so you need to know which bit of the exam does what.

## **MARK BAND DESCRIPTORS**

Band 6 evaluation

Band 5 analysis

Band 4 explanation

Band 3 some understanding

Band 2 some awareness

Band 1 very little grasp

### **Section A**

Section A of the exam requires you to focus in detail on **one** of your set texts. The choice is yours as to which of the 4 texts you choose to write about in this section, since there is one question on each text set by the board. You can answer on either a novel or a poet, it doesn't matter. You may already have a view about which of the 4 texts you know the best and would like to focus on for this section, but in reality we think it's best for you to keep your options open. In particular, have a read of the Section B questions before you make up your mind, since this may affect your choice.

Section A is itself in two parts, a) and b). You have to answer **both** parts of **one** question, spending around 30 minutes on each mini essay. Each part is assessing particular skills, so it's important to be aware of what these are before you start. Since these are mini-essays, you don't have time to fart about – get straight to the point. This means you don't even always need an introduction (for odd-numbered questions, unless you think it's necessary. Just two to three focused body paragraphs should do it.

#### **Section A, odd-numbered questions**

The odd-numbered questions are entirely focused on AO2, how the writer uses form, structure and language in their text. You don't need to worry about the other assessment objectives here. That doesn't mean to say that you can completely ignore how to write coherently, but it should get you thinking about how to focus. These questions will ask you a specific question about one or two chapters or poems from your set text. They will name the chapter(s) or poem(s) they want you to write about. There are 21 marks on offer here.

The secret to doing well at these questions is to be really focused on form, structure and language, and to provide a really close reading of what you are writing about.

Let's recap on what form, structure and language mean:

**Form** – the kind or type of text, i.e. novel or poem, but also the kind of novel or poem it is (genre, ballad, lyric poem, etc) and how it makes use of or challenges the conventions of its genre.

**Structure** – how the text is organised and put together. Why has the author structured the text or part of the text in the way they have? What are they seeking to achieve or convey?

**Language** – why has the author made the linguistic choices they have? This is particularly important with poetry in terms of imagery, but it is also important in novels in terms of characterisation, amongst other things.

Try to make sure you cover each of these aspects in your answer.

### What do these questions look like?

Here are a few sample questions:

- What methods does Hardy use to create settings in The Darkling Thrush and At Castle Boterel?
- Write about the ways Rossetti tells the story in Winter: My Secret.
- Write about some of the ways Fitzgerald tells the story in Chapter 5.
- Write about the ways that Hosseini tells the story in Chapter 7 of The Kite Runner.

As you can see, all of these questions are very focused on how the author has created their text – the techniques they have used. A good way of generating ideas for these is to make notes under the 6 narrative headings discussed at the beginning of this booklet. Making one of these the focus for each body paragraph of text will help you to stay focused on the job at hand.

### How are these marked? What are the examiners looking for?

Here is the marking criteria the exam board uses:

Band 1 (0-3)	U (approx)	AO2	<b>Very little grasp</b> of how the author's narrative methods work
Band 2 (4-6)	E (approx)	AO2	<b>Some awareness</b> of how the author's narrative methods work
Band 3 (7-9)	D (approx)	AO2	<b>Some understanding</b> of how the author's narrative methods work
Band 4 (10-13)	C (approx)	AO2	<b>Explanation</b> of how the author's narrative methods work
Band 5 (14-17)	B (approx)	AO2	<b>Analysis</b> of how the author's narrative methods work
Band 6 (18-21)	A (approx)	AO2	<b>Evaluation</b> of how the author's narrative methods work

Try to think about the difference between the particular grade bands and how these might cash out in practice.

Look at the following exemplar response, and the examiner's comments which follow. This should give you a pretty good idea of how to successfully approach this section of the exam.

#### **Write about some of the ways Fitzgerald tells the story in Chapter 8.**

Chapter 8 is extremely significant in this novel about Gatsby's romantic, pure but impossible dream that is destroyed by moral corruption and wealth. This chapter confirms the novel as an awful, 20th century tragedy as Fitzgerald uses the first person, retrospective and sympathetic narration of Nick to convey the tragic inevitability resulting from the aftermath of Gatsby's failed dream in chapter 7. Fitzgerald opens this chapter by establishing an ominous note: the 'fog-horn' groans incessantly' and in the night Nick 'tossed half-sick between grotesque reality and savage frightening dreams'; these images foreshadow the nightmare of Gatsby's death to come. This detail is juxtaposed with Nick's conversation with Gatsby where he suggests he should leave, the incredulity in Gatsby's voice 'Go away now, old sport?' conveying his tragic error of judgement in still believing in Daisy. Gatsby's

murder placed structurally at the end of this chapter emphasises how his tragic mistakes can only end in his death.

The story of the chapter is not told chronologically and after the focus on Nick and Gatsby in the narrative present at the start, Fitzgerald shifts back in time to when Daisy and Gatsby first met, embedding Gatsby's account into Nick's narrative. We learn how Gatsby's obsession began with Fitzgerald using the image of the grail to convey Gatsby's unwavering devotion, the dream Gatsby was always faithful to. This is juxtaposed with Daisy's material world of five years earlier: 'She vanished into her rich house, into her rich full life' suggesting how even then Gatsby's dream was doomed. Nick's voice is used as a commentator: 'leaving Gatsby - nothing', confirming how futile Gatsby's beliefs in Daisy are, and the failure of the dream increases our sense of the tragic inevitability.

Fitzgerald shifts in time again, recreating the past so we are aware of how it shapes the present. Gatsby's background is told ('He did extraordinarily well in the war'), making us sympathise with him further (interestingly we were told this but did not believe it in chapter 3), but Fitzgerald also supplies the back story here to juxtapose Gatsby's with Daisy's artificial world that was 'redolent of orchids and pleasant cheerful snobbery'. Daisy's awful moral corruption and emptiness against Gatsby's hard efforts at war convey that she is not trustworthy nor worthy to be the heart of Gatsby's dream.

Fitzgerald characterises her here as empty and shapeless to foreshadow her later choice to stay with Tom rather than protect Gatsby from death.

Fitzgerald briefly interrupts this past narrative to focus on Gatsby's present delusion, his belief that Daisy never loved Tom, the absurdity of Gatsby's state of mind highlighted by the 'curious' remark: 'it was just personal'. The past is succinctly filled in - Nick's reporting events Gatsby told him - all pointing towards Gatsby's desperate loneliness , juxtaposing his longing for the past with the tragic inevitability of the future. Fitzgerald ends the section with Nick's 'good-bye'.

Towards the end of the chapter, there are further time shifts to the events after Myrtle's death when Michaelis's narrative is embedded into Nick's to give a relentless factual account of Wilson's actions. This builds the suspense until the final moment Fitzgerald closes the chapter, like a classical tragedy, with Gatsby's murder, Wilson's suicide and 'the holocaust was complete'. Gatsby's death is conveyed almost beautifully with a 'thin red circle' confirming the idyllic life Gatsby believed in until death.

### **Commentary on Student 1 (response to Q 29 *The Great Gatsby*)**

This is an excellent answer in which the student shows insight and offers astute judgement. There is some intelligent thinking going on here and a real engagement with the story and Fitzgerald's methods. The student begins by focusing on the form of the text as revealed in chapter 8, the awful 20<sup>th</sup> century tragedy, and a relevant structural connection is made with chapter 7.

The main strength of the answer is the discussion of the chapter's structure and the relationship between structure and story is closely detailed in the second paragraph. There is good discussion of the non chronological pattern of the chapter, with the student writing confidently about how Fitzgerald embeds Gatsby's back-story into Nick's narrative. In the fourth paragraph there is evaluation of Fitzgerald's placement of the back-story with the present story of Daisy's moral corruption. Further structural comments are linked to Fitzgerald's use of different voices to reveal the key event of this chapter – Gatsby's death. The student evaluates how Michaelis's voice is

used by Fitzgerald to build suspense and secure the chapter as a classical tragedy. Throughout the answer the student demonstrates an ability to stand back from both the story and method and then assess their effects. These are clear Band 6 qualities.

## Section A, even-numbered questions

Again, there are 21 marks on offer here. These questions work by giving you a critical statement about your chosen text and asking you how far you agree with it. The even-numbered questions focus on assessment objectives 1, 3 and 4, and are therefore more interpretative than the odd-numbered questions. The question won't usually specify which bits of the text you need to focus on in your answer – you need to figure these out yourself. Since AO2 is not an assessment objective here, you need to worry less about close analysis here, though clearly you should still make reference to the text to support your argument.

A good answer needs to be well-structured, show interpretative skill, and an awareness of the context(s) of the text you are writing about. This doesn't have to be the context in which it was produced, but can mean the context of how it might be received.

The key things that the examiners want to see are:

### AO1

- Use of critical vocabulary
- Technically fluent expression
- A relevant and focused argument

### AO3

- Consideration of different interpretations of your text

### AO4

- Understanding of a range of contextual factors

You must show an awareness of each of these factors to get top grades here.

## What do these questions look like?

Here are a few sample questions:

- ‘Hardy’s poems reveal a morbid fascination with death.’ Write about this view.
- ‘Rossetti’s poems are an odd mixture of revelation and secrecy.’ Write about ‘Winter: My Secret’ and ‘Maude Clare’ in the light of this comment.
- How do you respond to the claim that ultimately *Enduring Love* is too contrived?
- What do you think of the view that obsession with money and the consumer culture of the 1920s dominates human thinking and behaviour in *The Great Gatsby*?

As you can see, each question begins by offering you a viewpoint and asking you to respond. These questions are more open so that the examiners can assess your skills of interpretation. A good response needs to cover all three assessment objectives as well as confidently arguing a viewpoint. You don’t need to definitely agree or disagree with the statement under discussion, perhaps the best option might be to consider both sides of the argument...

Introduction – focus on the statement under discussion
What evidence from the text might support the claim under discussion? (referring to two chapters or poems or characters from the text)
Connective, then consideration of evidence which might contradict the claim discussion (referring to one or two chapters or poems or characters from the text)
Conclusion – overall, do you agree or disagree with the statement under discussion? Why?

### How are these marked? What are the examiners looking for?

Here is the marking criteria the exam board uses:

Band 1 (0-3)	U (approx)	AO1  AO3  AO4	quality of writing hinders meaning; little relevance to task; little sense of argument <b>very little grasp</b> of an interpretation or interpretations; little textual support <b>very little grasp</b> of contextual factors
Band 2 (4-6)	E (approx)	AO1  AO3  AO4	simple writing; some awareness of critical vocabulary; may be technical weakness; some relevance to task; some sense of argument <b>some awareness</b> of an interpretation or interpretations with some reference to the text <b>some awareness</b> of relevant contextual factors
Band 3 (7-9)	D (approx)	AO1  AO3  AO4	generally clear expression; some use of critical vocabulary; generally accurate writing; relevant to the task; argument developing <b>some understanding</b> of an interpretation or interpretations with textual support <b>some understanding</b> of relevant contextual factors
Band 4 (10-13)	C (approx)	AO1  AO3  AO4	accurate expression; clear use of critical vocabulary; accurate writing; clear argument <b>explanation</b> of an interpretation or interpretations with clear supportive references <b>explanation</b> of relevant contextual factors
Band 5 (14-17)	B (approx)	AO1  AO3  AO4	confident and assured expression; appropriate use of critical vocabulary; generally fluent and accurate assured argument <b>analysis</b> of an interpretation or interpretations with well chosen textual support <b>analysis</b> of relevant contextual factors
Band 6 (18-21)	A (approx)	AO1  AO3	sophisticated expression; excellent use of critical vocabulary; technically fluent writing; sophisticated shaped arguments <b>evaluation</b> of an interpretation or interpretations with

Again, try to think about the difference between the particular grade bands and how these might cash out in practice.

Look at the following exemplar response, and the examiner's comments which follow. This should give you a pretty good idea of how to successfully approach this section of the exam.

**How appropriate do you think it is to label *The Great Gatsby* 'a rags to riches story'?**

Within *The Great Gatsby*, the idea of moving from 'rags to riches' is certainly a key pattern. Despite this, the structure of events do not comply with the 'rags to riches' formula, and Gatsby's pursuit of 'riches' ultimately does not seem to be enough to satisfy his ambition.

Within the non-chronological effects of the narrative, Gatsby does not seem to be presented as moving from 'rags to riches'. Before his appearance in chapter three, Gatsby's identity is built up to by description of his elaborate home (a 'factual imitation of a Hotel de Ville in Normandy') and his impressive party (salads of harlequin designs' and causing the 'moon [to have] risen higher, and floating in the Sound was a triangle of silver scales, trembling a little to the ...banjos on the lawn'). This portrays Gatsby to be, like the characters of 'fashionable east egg' to be very much in command of the 'riches'. The revelation that

he, unlike the Buchanans or Nick, has transformed from 'rags' to the outward appearance of glamour is so well hidden by his facade that it is only revealed gradually through the novel. It is not fully placed in the open until Tom's adamant calling of Gatsby 'Mr Nobody from Nowhere' and a 'common swindler' in chapter seven. This could link to the idea of the money-obsessed world of the 'roaring' 1920s, in which a

past of lower-status (or gaining of 'new money') was something to be concealed and perhaps ashamed of. In addition, despite the realisation that Gatsby has chronologically gone from rags to riches, this is not enough for him, and the primary focus of the story seems to be on his attempted transition from riches to *more* riches. He pursues Daisy incessantly, Nick acknowledging in chapter four the absurdity of having

'bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths' - so that he could 'come over' to speak with Daisy. Gatsby 'revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes'. This displays the way that although Gatsby has achieved the vast riches of a man of high status, he is unable to truly be happy and satisfied unless he has one more crowning possession - Daisy Buchanan. Even when he has re-entered her affections he demands that she tell Tom 'I never

loved you', constantly grasping for just one more piece of 'riches' to add to his collection. This can also be said of the other characters, such as Tom who has 'reached such an acute limited excellence at the age

of twenty-one that everything afterward savours of anti-climax'. The characters in the novel aren't satisfied

with just 'riches'. This links to the American Dream, as Fitzgerald perhaps criticises that it is flawed, as humans are always trying to take and gain as much as they can. Nick concludes the novel with this idea, that 'tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further' but we will never gain enough 'riches' to be satisfied.

On the other hand, it could be argued that within the money-obsessed 1920s culture, conveyed by the novel, 'riches' remains the ultimate goal of achieving happiness. Myrtle (with her 'crowded to the doors' apartment) seems to dream

of moving from rags to riches, and Gatsby, although eventually dissatisfied does achieve his position within the story through his 'rags to riches' encounter with Dan Cody. These instances seem to suggest that the story is one of 'rags to riches' and Fitzgerald's portrayal of their dissatisfaction with it only shows that they remain in the transition stage from rags to riches. However, this view doesn't take into account the final fate of these characters. Myrtle ends up 'giving up [her] tremendous vitality' as she is hit by Gatsby's car (effectively killed by his riches) and Gatsby too is unsuccessful in achieving his dreams of truly entering the upper class (and gaining the status of riches).

This ultimately means that the novel is not a 'rags to riches' story, as the characters fail to achieve the riches they desire.

On the whole, the novel includes the pattern of pursuing 'riches', but it cannot be said to be a 'rags to riches' story. This is because the real focus is arguably on what happens to Gatsby when he is dissatisfied with his 'riches' and desires more. The deaths at the end of the novel prove that 'riches' are out of reach for Myrtle, and Gatsby, who desire them.

#### **Commentary on Student 9 (response to Q30 Fitzgerald)**

This question is also set up around genre, though this student approaches the task from a social and cultural angle which works very well. The student focuses well on the formula that is suggested by the rags to riches genre and challenges the concept in relation to the events and outcomes of the story. There is excellent discussion of the text's chronology in relation to Gatsby and his riches and the selection of textual detail is superb. This student clearly knows the text very well and makes very wise choices. There is clearly some intelligent thinking here in interrogating the meaning of 'riches' for Gatsby – and for Tom Buchanan- and ideas about the American Dream are well integrated. The argument is very well shaped and the quality of expression is very good. Overall this is a sophisticated response and the student is consistently evaluative. The answer is clearly at the top end of the Band 6 range.

## **Section B**

Section B of the exam is the Big Kahuna, the question that requires you to write about three texts at once. These have to be the three texts that you haven't written about in Section A, since you must write about all 4 texts in the exam. If you don't do this, you may get zero. You have been warned...

Section B will give you a choice of 2 questions. You answer **one** of these. You spend around 1 hour on your answer. There are 42 marks on offer. The questions are fairly broad, and require you to write comparatively about the three texts under discussion. Each question will ask you about how an aspect of narrative is explored in all three texts. Clearly, in a one-hour essay you can't write about an entire novel or collection of poetry, let alone three, so you need to be selective in terms of what you choose to write about. You still need to show an awareness of an entire text, so try to mention more than one chapter of a novel or more than one poem by each poet, to show you know them really well. Try to write more or less equally on each of the three texts, though clearly your writing on one of them could be briefer than the other two.

#### **What are the examiners looking for here?**

This question is assessing Assessment Objectives 1, 2 and 3. This means:

**AO1**

- Use of critical vocabulary
- Technically fluent expression
- Structure and coherence of argument
- Relevance and focus on task

**AO2**

- Exploration and analysis of key aspects of form and structure
- Exploration and analysis of key aspects of language

**AO3**

- Connections and comparisons between texts
- Consideration of different interpretations of texts
- Use of supportive references

You will notice that AO4 – contexts – is missing here.

**What do these questions look like?**

Here are a couple of sample questions:

- Write about the importance of places in the telling of the narratives in three texts that you have studied.
- Write about the ways that writers aim to make the beginnings of their texts exciting. Refer to three texts you have studied.

As you can see, the questions are broader, focusing on one general aspect of narrative across the three texts. At least one question may well relate to one of the 6 narrative headings we have been exploring, although they also like to ask about the beginning and ends of texts too.

In terms of structuring your response, you should have an introduction, followed by a body paragraph on each of the three texts, and then a conclusion. When shifting from one text to the next, link your thoughts with a connective word or sentence. Here's an example of what I mean. I have also indicated how much of each text you should discuss in each section:

Introduction – focus on the narrative theme under discussion
Discussion of the theme in Text A (referring to two chapters or poems from the text)
Connective, then discussion of the theme in Text B (referring to two chapters or poems from the text)
Connective, then discussion of the theme in Text C (referring to one chapter or poem from the text)
Conclusion (referring to all three texts)

**How are these marked? What are the examiners looking for?**

Here is the marking criteria the exam board uses:

Band 1 (0-7)	U (approx)	AO1 AO2 AO3	quality of writing hinders meaning; little relevance to task; little sense of argument <b>Very little grasp</b> of how the author's narrative methods work in relation to the question <b>Very little grasp</b> of the question and its significance across the three texts with little textual support
Band 2 (8-14)	E (approx)	AO1 AO2 AO3	simple writing; some awareness of critical vocabulary; may be technical weaknesses; some relevance to task; some sense of argument <b>Some awareness</b> of how the author's narrative methods work in relation to the question <b>Some awareness</b> of the question and its significance across the three texts with some references to the texts
Band 3 (15-21)	D (approx)	AO1 AO2 AO3	generally clear expression; some understanding of critical vocabulary; generally accurate writing; relevant to task <b>Some understanding</b> of how the author's narrative methods work in relation to the question <b>Some understanding</b> of the question and its significance across the three texts with textual support
Band 4 (22-28)	C (approx)	AO1 AO2 AO3	clear expression; clear use of critical vocabulary; accurate writing; clear argument <b>Explanation</b> of how the author's narrative methods work in relation to the question <b>Explanation</b> of the question and its significance across the three texts with clear supportive references
Band 5 (29-35)	B (approx)	AO1 AO2 AO3	confident and assured expression; appropriate use of critical vocabulary; accurate and generally fluent writing; assured argument <b>Analysis</b> of how the author's narrative methods work in relation to the question <b>Analysis</b> of the question and its significance across the three texts with well chosen textual support
Band 6 (36-42)	A (approx)	AO1 AO2 AO3	sophisticated expression; excellent use of critical vocabulary; technically fluent and accurate writing; sophisticated shaped argument <b>Evaluation</b> of how the author's narrative methods work in relation to the question <b>Evaluation</b> of the question and its significance across the three texts with excellently selected references

Once again, try to think about the difference between the particular grade bands and how these might cash out in practice.

Look at the following exemplar response, and the examiner's comments which follow. This should give you a pretty good idea of how to successfully approach this section of the exam.

**Write about some of the ways characters are created in the three texts you have studied.**

Characters are created through a range of narrative devices, with time and setting, voice and character relationships being key in how a character is received by a reader.

In ‘The Great Gatsby’ Fitzgerald has implemented a meta-fictional narrator to tell the story, with Nick Carraway remaining a spectator to the events of the novel, rather than an actor. His character is devised by Fitzgerald predominantly through his narrative, as his desire to remain an observer in the story demonstrates his reserved characteristic. Furthermore, he describes himself as ‘one of the few honest people’ he knows, showing that he wants his account of the story to be accepted as true; however, the audience is led to doubt his veracity as he states ‘I’m inclined to reserve all judgements’ before contradicting himself in the same passage by firstly depicting Gatsby as someone who ‘represented everything...I have an unaffected scorn’, and also judging the Buchanan’s, as Daisy’s ‘insincerity’ rings in her voice whilst Tom’s ‘pathetic complacency’ can be taken from his racist remarks.

Moreover, Nick is given a characteristic trait of wanting things in a uniform, refined state, as his actions of wiping from Mr McKee’s cheek ‘the sport of dried lather’, or erasing the obscenities written outside of Gatsby’s house, demonstrate an almost compulsive need to keep things clean and in order.

Similarly, his account of Gatsby’s life is dealt with in this way, as Nick romanticises Gatsby’s corrupt American Dream and thwarted love as ‘the orgastic future’. Fitzgerald’s choice to narrate the novel in this way is significant in building Gatsby’s character, as the reader’s last perspective of Gatsby is that of Nick, with him depicting an elusive dream that we will all try to chase. In this way, Gatsby is shown to be remarkable, because unlike other characters in the novel, he has ambition; Fitzgerald is able to contrast Gatsby with the ‘careless’ Buchanans, and ‘spiritless’ George Wilson. He is dissimilar to them all, and so shown to be great.

Similarly, In ‘Enduring Love’, McEwan is able to build the character of Inspector Linley significantly through Joe’s narrative, which, alike Nick’s in ‘The Great Gatsby’ is integral to the reader’s response. The setting of the police station – described as a place of ‘friction’, the ‘wear and tear’ telling of neglect – is the first representation of Linley’s character. His ‘fluorescent pallor’ is comparable to the dirty exterior of the police station, suggesting that he cares little about appearance. The general look of neglect also implies that he is disinterested with his work, or no longer cares about helping. This is supported by the comment that he’d be ‘looking at retirement’. His ‘strangulated’ voice is also key in the development of his character, as it is implicit of ‘imbecility’, but could also be interpreted as a portrayal of his reticence. Joe describes him as building on silences – possibly to intimidate witnesses – and so this characteristic could be a depiction of his efficiency in his job, and a degree of professionalism and skill. However, the ‘electronic whistle of breath’ is suggestive of his mechanical nature, and the rather staid, robotic atmosphere of the police station, which is built through voice.

McEwan creates a sense of repetition as Linley asks short, snappy questions, quoting from ‘The Public Order Act’ as if having said this many times before. The accelerated pace of the dialogue also reflects his impatience, and Joe’s reaction to this as he comments, ‘I was doing well to keep calm’, showing that Linley’s actions may have been interpreted by Joe as rude or irritating. Voice similarly builds on Gatsby’s character, as the affectation of ‘old sport’ in much of his speech reflects how the man has created a self-representation of himself, and the forced manner of the colloquialism suggests that he is rather false, or trying to impress Daisy by the use of a European saying.

Moreover, the indirect voices of neighbours is implemented in Rossetti’s ‘Jessie Cameron’ to build on the sense of mystery which surrounds Cameron’s admirer. The enigma of this character is heightened by the use of indeterminates such as ‘some say’, which is repeated in the fifth stanza in order to build on the sense of speculation.

Rossetti also uses ‘unked’, the archaic language adding to the strangeness of his character, as he becomes all the more mysterious due to the odd language. Nature is also used as a pathetic fallacy for his emotions, as the sea ‘crept moaning’ whilst his speech ‘waxed...urgent...louder’. His impatience is displayed by a quickening pace of dialogue, as in ‘Enduring Love’, whilst his desperation and adoration of Jessie Cameron is depicted throughout the repetition of her name, as well as by the action of following her along the beach despite ‘her heedless tongue’. Jessie Cameron’s actions are as much a reflection of his own, building on the ambiguity of his character as the reader wonders whether he ‘helped or hindered’ her, because her flirtatious manner suggests she stayed through her own choice.

The female voice in ‘Jessie Cameron’ is similar to that of ‘Winter: My secret’, as the sound-play and conversational tone build on the narrator’s coaxing manner. This is also similar to Daisy, as in ‘The Great Gatsby’, it is her charm and laughter which captivates Gatsby, as does the playful femininity of the narrator of the dramatic monologue engage the reader. The use of long vowel sounds in ‘froze, and blows and snows’ are contrasted by the mono-syllabic ‘fire’ in the following line builds on the character’s sense of enjoyment, with the poem’s rhythm adding to the idea that they are having fun. Furthermore, as the notion of needing to be protected is introduced in the second stanza, it can be assumed that the narrator is vulnerable, as she needs ‘a veil, a clock...wraps’. However, this teasing narrative could simply be the character’s bid for attention, as the rhyme scheme deviates away from the conversational tone and further engages the reader.

Also, the secret allows her to have a certain possession over the auditor, as we know little of her, and this is similar to Jed Parry in ‘Enduring Love’, whose ‘homo-erotic obsession’, though flagrantly put forth, is never fully understood by the reader or Joe. Our lack of knowledge of Jed’s condition adds to the threat he poses to Joe, and alike the narrative of his letter in chapter 16 as ‘never, never...pretend’ is ominous, and suggestive of peril due to the imperative language and repetition- builds on Joe’s own fear and vulnerability.

On the whole, the texts I have studied sufficiently build character through narrative voice and setting, as well as by the way in which they engage the reader. Interesting texts and characters forged a relationship with the reader, so that they have their own perspective of characters, such as ‘Winter: My Secret’ so that we respond to the flirtatious voice in a certain way; the nonsensical element also adds some humour, making the narrator seem rather comical. Yet, its ambiguity could lead to darker meanings, as the reader could interpret the uncertainty cultivated as being implicit of the narrator’s own psychological perplexities, as is Jed’s ‘one thousandth letter’ to Joe, which not only reflects the significance and strength of his belief, but also narrates the endurance of his compulsion, and so is intimate of his rather sad and unstable existence.

42/42 – A very enjoyable response which ranges confidently around the texts - focuses fully on methods of creating character with real attention to detail. Clearly expressed throughout with perceptive exploration.

## Practice exam questions

Now you know how the exam works, you can have a go at answering a few practice questions. For Section A, there are two questions on offer for each text, and there is a choice of 3 Section B questions.

Have a go at answering as many of these as you can. Writing to the correct time limit will clearly be useful as well.

## **Section A**

### ***The Great Gatsby***

Odd-numbered style questions:

- Write about some of the ways Fitzgerald tells the story in Chapter 3.
- Write about the ways Fitzgerald tells the story in Chapter 6.

Even-numbered style questions:

- ‘*The Great Gatsby* is essentially the story of East and West.’ Discuss this view.
- Within *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald seeks to show us the ‘moral failure of the Jazz age’. How far do you agree with this statement?

### ***The Kite Runner***

Odd-numbered style questions:

- Write about the ways Hosseini opens the story in Chapter 1.
- Write about the ways Hosseini tells the story in Chapter 10.

Even-numbered style questions:

- Some readers see the title *The Kite Runner* as representing a journey. What meanings can you find in the title of the text?
- What significance does discrimination have in *The Kite Runner* as a whole?

### ***Alfred Tennyson***

Odd-numbered style questions:

- Write about the ways in which Tennyson tells the story of “The Lotus Eaters” in the first five stanzas of the poem.
- What methods does Tennyson use to create settings in “The Lady of Shalott”?.

Even-numbered style questions:

- ‘Tennyson felt very little in common with a rapidly changing industrial world, for his deepest sympathies were called forth by an unaltered rural England.’ Write about “The Lotus Eaters” in light of this comment.
- Scholars often understand “The Lady of Shalott” to be about the conflict between art and life. How do you respond to this reading of the poem?

### ***Christina Rossetti***

Odd-numbered style questions:

- Write about the ways Rossetti tells the story in “Maude Clare”.
- Look again at “Jessie Cameron” and write about Rossetti’s narrative methods.

Even-numbered style questions:

- How far do you agree with the view that Rossetti’s work presents an effective social critique of Victorian society?
- It has been said that women and their struggles are at the heart of Rossetti’s work. Write about this view.

## Section B

- Write about the ways that writers use point of view in their texts. Refer to three texts you have studied.
- Write about the ways writers have made effective use of time and sequence in three texts you have studied.
- Writers often choose their titles carefully to allow for different potential meanings. Write about some potential meanings of titles in the **three** texts you have studied.