Short Stories - Cambridge AS Level

from

Stories of Ourselves
Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849)

*The Fall of the House of Usher*

This is one of the most famous gothic stories from one of the masters of the genre and contains many of the traditional elements of the genre, including horror, death, medievalism, an ancient building and signs of great psychological disturbance. The mood of oppressive melancholy is established at the opening of the story and here readers may note an acknowledgement of the appeal of gothic fiction: while there is fear and horror, the shudder is ‘thrilling’ and the ‘sentiment’ is ‘half-pleasurable’.

At the centre of the story are mysteries, about the psychological state of Usher himself and about his sister’s illness and death. The story only offers hints and suggestions; there is an ‘oppressive secret’, while the sister, buried in a strangely secure vault, returns as if risen from the dead to claim her brother. In archetypal gothic fashion, a raging storm of extreme violence mirrors the destruction of the family and its ancestral home.

Horror stories and horror films continue to have wide popular appeal and it is worth considering why this is so, and in what ways this story fulfils the appeal of the horror story.

Why are Usher’s and his sister’s maladies never identified? What does Madeline’s escape from the vault suggest?

**Compare with**

*The Door in the Wall* by HG Wells

*The Hollow of the Three Hills* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

*The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

*The Fall of the House of Usher*

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

**Context:**

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809, and dies on October 7, 1849. In his forty years Poe achieved many things including a marriage to his cousin, fights with other writers, and well documented drinking binges. He was a magazine editor, a poet, a short story writer, a critic, and a lecturer. Poe is known for having introduced the detective story, science fiction, literary criticism and the gothic genre to America.

The circumstances of Poe’s own life can be seen throughout his writings. His father disappeared shortly after his birth leaving Poe orphaned at three when his mother died of tuberculosis. Poe was then taken in by John and Frances Allan who were wealthy theatregoers and knew his parents. Poe’s relationship with John was very turbulent and Frances passed before Poe was in school. Poe attended school in England with Allan’s help and later enrolled at the University of Virginia in 1826. After attending for a mere two semesters Poe was asked to leave.

After leaving the University of Virginia, Poe spent time in the military before he entered the magazine industry. With little experience Poe convinced Thomas Willis White head of the
Southern Literary Messenger, a then fledgling publication, to take him on board as an editor in 1835. This position gave Poe a forum for his early writings and established his career as a leading and controversial literary critic known for attacking his British counterparts.

Poe ultimately fell out of favour with White but his popularity as a critic made him a popular speaker on the lecture circuit. Poe never achieved his ultimate dream - the creation of his own magazine which he intended to name Stylus.

Poe’s name has since become tied to macabre tales such as “The Tell-Tale Heart,” but Poe assumed a number of literary personas during his career. The Messenger—as well as Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine and Graham’s—established Poe as one of America’s first popular literary critics. In the pages of these magazines Poe also introduced a new form of short fiction - the detective story- in tales featuring a Parisian crime solver named C. Auguste Duplin. The detective story follows naturally on from Poe’s interest in puzzles, word games, and secret codes, which he loved to present and decode in the pages of the Messenger to dazzle his readers. The word “detective” did not exist in English at the time Poe was writing, but the genre has become a fundamental mode of literature and film. Dupin and his techniques of psychological inquiry have informed countless sleuths, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe.

Gothic literature, a genre that rose with Romanticism in Britain in the late eighteenth century, explores the dark side of the human experience - death, alienation, nightmares, ghosts, and haunted landscapes. American Gothic literature dramatises a culture plagued by poverty and slavery through characters afflicted by various forms of insanity and melancholy. Poe generated a Gothic ethos from his own experiences in Virginia and other slaveholding territories, and the black and white imagery in his stories reflects a growing national anxiety over the issue of slavery.

Poe’s Gothic tales are brief flashes of chaos that flare up within lonely narrators living at the fringes of society. Poe’s longest work, the 1838 novel Arthur Gordon Pym, described in diary form a series of episodes on a journey to Antarctica. A series of bizarre incidents and exotic discoveries at sea, Pym lacks the cohesive elements of plot or quest that tie together most novels and epics and is widely considered a failure. Poe’s style and concerns never found their best expression in longer forms, but his short stories are considered masterpieces worldwide.

Summary:

An unnamed narrator approaches the house of Usher on a ‘dull, dark, and soundless day.’ This house- the estate of a boyhood friend, Roderick Usher- is gloomy and mysterious. The narrator observes that the house seems to have absorbed an evil and diseased atmosphere from the decaying trees and murky ponds around it. He notes that although the house is decaying in places the structure itself is fairly solid. There is only a small crack which runs from the roof to the ground in the front of the building. He has come to the house because his friend Roderick sent him a letter requesting his company. Roderick’s letter noted that he was feeling physically and emotionally ill, so the narrator is rushing to his assistance. The narrator supplies the reader with a limited history of the family noting that they are an ancient clan but have never flourished. In each generation only one member of the family has survived forming a direct line of decent.

1. Why is the narrator unnamed?
2. Does the crack at the front of the house symbolise anything?
3. The narrator is feeling both physically and emotionally unwell. Does this have any connection with the state of the manor?

The narrator finds himself inside the house, which is just as spooky on the inside as it appeared on the outside. He notes that Roderick appears paler and less energetic than he used to be. Roderick tells the narrator that he suffers from nervous disorder which has left his senses heightened. The narrator also notes at this point that Roderick seems afraid of the house to which he is confined. We are introduced to Madeline, Roderick’s sister, whom it seems is also ill with a mysterious sickness that the doctors cannot reverse. After several days spent in the unsuccessful pursuit of raising Roderick’s spirits, Roderick theorises that it is the house itself which is unhealthy (a connection to the narrator’s earlier note).

4. What do you think haunts Roderick?

Madeline dies and Roderick decides to bury her temporarily in the tombs below the house. He wants to keep her body in the house as he believes doctors may dig up her body of scientific examination, as her disease was so strange to them. The narrator helps Roderick place his sister in the tomb, and he notes Madeline’s rosy cheeks. The narrator is shocked by the sudden realisation that Madeline and Roderick were twins. Roderick continues to act uneasy as the days pass. One night, when the narrator is unable to sleep Roderick knocks on the door to his room, apparently hysterical. He leads the narrator to the window, from which they see a bright-looking gas surrounding the house. The narrator tries to reassure Roderick.

5. What could the gas be symbolic of?

In an attempt to soothe Roderick the narrator decides to read to him. He reads “Mad Trist” by Sir Lancelot Canning, a medieval romance. As he reads he begins to hear noises that correspond to those in the story. Initially, he ignores the noises, dismissing them as his overactive imagination but, soon they become more distinct and the narrator can no longer ignore them. He notices that Roderick is slumped in his chair and he moves over to listen to what he is muttering. Roderick reveals that he has been hearing these sounds for days, and that he believes they buried Madeline alive and she is trying to escape. He yells that she is at the door. The wind blows the door open and confirms Roderick’s fears: Madeline stands in robes bloodied from her struggle. She attacks him as the life drains from her and Roderick dies of fear. The narrator flees the house. As he escapes, the entire house cracks along the crack noted in the opening scene and crumbles to the ground.

6. What is the connection between the Ushers and their home? Why does it crumble to the ground?
7. Analyse the following quote:

“A striking similitude between the brother and the sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them.”

Main Theme

The central theme of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is terror that arises from the complexity and multiplicity of forces that shape human destiny. Dreadful, horrifying events result not from a single, uncomplicated circumstance but from a collision and intermingling of manifold, complex circumstances. In Poe’s story, the House of Usher falls to ruin for the reasons listed under "Other Themes" (below).

Other Themes

Evil

Evil has been at work in the House of Usher for generations, befouling the residents of the mansion. Roderick Usher's illness is "a constitutional and family evil . . . one for which he despaired to find a remedy," the narrator reports. Usher himself later refers to this evil in Stanza V of "The Haunted Palace," a ballad he sings to the accompaniment of his guitar music. The palace in the ballad represents the House of Usher. The first two lines of Stanza V are as follows:

    But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
    Assailed the monarch's high estate.

Neither of these references identifies the exact nature of the evil. However, clues in the story suggest that the evil infecting the House of Usher is incest. Early in the story, the narrator implies there has been marriage between relatives:

    I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all
    time-honoured as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other
    words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with
    very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain.

Later, the narrator describes Madeline Usher as her brother’s “tenderly beloved sister–his sole companion for long years.” He also notes that Roderick Usher's illness "displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations."

Isolation

Roderick and Madeline Usher seal themselves inside their mansion, cutting themselves off from friends, ideas, progress. They have become musty and mildewed, sick unto their souls for lack of contact with the outside world.

Failure to Adapt

The Usher family has become obsolete because it failed to throw off the vestiges of outmoded tradition, a failing reflected by the mansion itself, a symbol of the family. The interior continues to display coats-of-arms and other paraphernalia from the age of kings.
and castles. As to the outside, “Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves.”

**Madness**

Roger and Madeline suffer from mental illness characterized by anxiety, depression, and other symptoms. Catalepsy, a symptom of Madeline’s illness, is a condition that causes muscle rigidity and temporary loss of consciousness and feeling for several minutes, several hours, and, in some cases, more than a day. Generally, it is not an illness in itself but a symptom of an illness, such as schizophrenia, epilepsy, hysteria, alcoholism or a brain tumour. Certain drugs, too, can trigger a cataleptic episode. The victim does not respond to external stimuli, even painful stimuli such as a pinch on the skin. In the past, a victim of catalepsy was sometimes pronounced dead by a doctor unfamiliar with the condition. Apparently, Madeline is not dead when her brother and the narrator entomb her; instead, she is in a state of catalepsy. When she awakens from her trance, she breaks free of her confines, enters her brother’s chamber, and falls on him. She and her brother then die together. Besides Roger and Madeline, the narrator himself may suffer from mental instability, given his reaction to the depressing scene he describes in the opening paragraphs. If he is insane, all of the events he describes could be viewed as manifestations of his sick mind—illusions, dreams, hallucinations.

**Mystery**

From the very beginning, the narrator realizes that he is entering a world of mystery when he crosses the tarn bridge. He observes, "What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble."

**Strange Phenomena**

The narrator describes the mansion as having a “pestilent and mystic” vapor enveloping it. He also says Roderick Usher “was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted.”

**Symbolism**

**The Fungus-Ridden Mansion:** Decline of the Usher family.  
**The Collapsing Mansion:** Fall of the Usher family.  
**The “Vacant eye-like” Windows of the Mansion:** (1) Hollow, cadaverous eyes of Roderick Usher; (2) Madeline Usher’s cataleptic gaze; (3) the vacuity of life in the Usher mansion.  
**The Tarn, a Small Lake Encircling the Mansion and Reflecting Its Image:** (1) Madeline as the twin of Roderick, reflecting his image and personality; (2) the image of reality which Roderick and the narrator perceive; though the water of the tarn reflects details exactly, the image is upside down, leaving open the possibility that Roderick and the narrator see a false reality; (3) the desire of the Ushers to isolate themselves from the outside world.  
**The Bridge Over the Tarn:** The narrator as Roderick Usher’s only link to the outside world.  
**The name Usher:** An usher is a doorkeeper. In this sense, Roderick Usher opens the door to a frightening world for the narrator.  
**The Storm:** The turbulent emotions experienced by the characters.
Foreshadowing

The narrator’s reference to catalepsy—describing Madeline Usher as having “affections of a partially cataleptical character”—foreshadows her burial while she is still alive.

8. What is Catalepsy?

Madeline as Target of Murder Plot

Although physicians are incapable of curing Madeline’s illness, they recognise “transient” catalepsy as one of its symptoms, the narrator reports. This information means that both Roderick and the narrator are aware that Madeline occasionally enters trances resembling rigor mortis. Furthermore, the narrator reports that Madeline has “the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face” before he and Roderick screw down the coffin lid. One may theorise, then, that Roderick and the narrator are aware that Madeline is still alive when they close her coffin and, therefore, that they are attempting to commit murder. If that is what they are doing, the next question that arises is why. Here is a possible scenario: Roderick, as Madeline’s twin, is united to her in looks and personality. The narrator even suggests that they communicate through extrasensory perception, pointing out that “sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them.” There is a possibility, too, that they are partners in incest—which, in their case, would be a kind of narcissism, or self-love, because they would be making love to their own image. Now to the motives: It may be that Roderick is longing for independence; he does not want to be simply a mirror image or alter ego of his sister. Also, he may wish to end the oppressive guilt he suffers under the burden of the family evil, incest. It may be, too, that he wants to rid himself of the illness Madeline passes on to him via the “sympathies” described above. So he decides to eliminate her. He summons his friend (the narrator) to commiserate with him, hearten him, and help him dispose of Madeline while she is in the throes of a cataleptic trance. After awakening from the trance, Madeline—refusing to allow Roderick to dissemble their relationship—summons unearthly strength to break out of her coffin and the vault. Then, after entering her brother’s chamber, she thrusts herself upon him “and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.” Their bodies locked, they go to their doom as a single, pitiful lump of humanity.

Analysis:

_The Fall of the House of Usher_ possesses the quintessential features of the gothic tale:

- A haunted house
- A dreary landscape
- Mysterious illness
- Doubled personality

For all of these easily identifiable Gothic elements part of its effectiveness is in its vagueness. The audience cannot say for sure where the tale is set because instead of using traditional markers of time and place Poe uses traditional Gothic elements such as weather change and a barren landscape. Poe captures the audience along side the narrator in this haunted
space, and neither of us knows why. Although the narrator is Roderick’s boyhood friend he apparently knows very little about him- for instance, he does not know that Roderick and Madeline are twins. Poe leaves us to question the reasons for Roderick’s contacting the narrator and for the urgency of the narrator’s response. While Poe does provide the audience with recognisably Gothic elements, he contrasts the standard form with a plot that is inexplicable, sudden, and full of unexpected disruptions. The story begins with no real explanation of the narrator’s motives, and this ambiguity sets the tone for the rest of the plot; a plot which continually blurs the real and the fantastic.

Throughout the text Poe successfully creates a sense of claustrophobia. The narrator seems to be trapped by some mysterious attraction to Roderick, one which isn’t broken until Roderick’s death allowing the narrator to flee the House of Usher. Poe, creates confusion throughout the text through his doubling of the house (referred to as the House of Usher) with the genetic line that owns it. Poe employs the word “house” metaphorically, but he also describes a real house. Not only does the narrator become trapped inside the mansion, but we learn that this confinement also describes the fate of the Ushers. The family has no genetic branches, therefore all reproduction has been as the result of incest.

The claustrophobia of the mansion affects the relationships of those under its roof. For example, the narrator realises very late in the piece that Roderick and Madeline are twins, and this only occurs as the two men prepare to entomb Madeline. The cramped setting of the burial tomb is symbolic of the twins- they cannot develop as individuals. Madeline is buried before she has actually passed because her similarities to Roderick is like a coffin which holds her identity. Madeline, like many female literary characters of the nineteenth century, invests her identity in her body while Roderick’s are invested in his intellect. Despite this Madeline is the more powerful, sometimes almost super-humanly so- when she breaks out of the tomb- her power therefore acts as a contrast to Roderick’s weak, nervous and immobile disposition. Some scholars argue that Madeline does not even exist, but is in fact a shared figment of imagination between the narrator and Roderick. Whichever it maybe it cannot be argues that Madeline remains central to the story’s symmetry. Madeline stifles Roderick by preventing him from seeing himself as different to her. She completes her attack when she kills him at the end of the story.

Doubling is a technique used throughout the story. The tale highlights the Gothic feature of what many of us would call a doppelganger, or character double. The narrator, for example, first sees the mansion as a reflection in a shallow pool. The mirror image of the house is seen to be upside down- a relationship that also characterises the relationship between Roderick and Madeline (twins).

The story also alludes to other literary works.

**Characters:**

**Narrator**

- Poe meticulously, from the opening paragraph through to the last, details the development of the narrator’s initial uneasiness into a frenzy of terror, engendered by and parallel to Usher’s terrors.

- The narrator attributes his fantasy to his subjective perceptions. We the readers never do know what is real, what is a dream or the product of mutual hysteria. "Shaking off from my
spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building."

- There is a split consciousness in the narrator's mind between the rational and supernatural. He sees a face in the tarn, a split fissure in the house and the double image of his own face superimposed on the death's head image of the house.

- Narrator admits to being a participant in Usher's hysteria: "Rationally Usher's condition terrified, it infected me... I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet uncertain degrees, the wild influence of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions."

- In contrast to Roderick, the narrator appears to be a man of common sense. He seems to have a good heart in that he comes to help a friend from his boyhood. He is also educated and analytical. He observes Usher and concludes that his friend has a mental disorder. He looks for natural scientific explanations for what Roderick senses. Criticising Usher for his fantasies, the narrator claims that Roderick is "enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted." The narrator's tone suggests that he cannot understand Usher. However, he himself is superstitious. When he looks upon the house, even before he met Roderick Usher, he observes "[t]here can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition." The narrator also automatically turns away from an unpleasant truth by reasoning or by focusing on something else. When he and Roderick go down to bury Madeline, he speculates that she may not be completely dead yet. Studying her face, he notes "the mockery of faint blush upon the bosom and the face..." Yet, rather than mentioning his suspicion to his friend, he remains silent and continues the burial. Furthermore, when Roderick claims that there are ghosts in the house, the narrator feels fear too, but he dismisses Roderick's and his own fear by attributing them to a natural cause. He tells Roderick that "the appearances ...are merely...not uncommon." In the end, this fear finally overcomes him. Although he had been able to suppress his fears all along, Lady Madeline's reappearance runs him out of the house.

**Roderick Usher**

Roderick Usher, the head of the house, is an educated man. He comes from a rather wealthy family and owns a huge library. He had once been an attractive man and "the character of his face had been at all times remarkable." However, his appearance deteriorated over time. Roderick had changed so much that "[the narrator] doubted to whom [he] spoke." Roderick's altered appearance probably was caused by his insanity. The narrator notes various symptoms of insanity from Roderick's behaviour: "in the manner of my friend I was struck with an incoherence -- an inconsistency...habitual trepidancy, and excessive nervous agitation...His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision...to that...of the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium." These are "the features of the mental disorder of [the narrator's] friend." Roderick's state worsens throughout the story. He becomes increasingly restless and unstable, especially after the burial of his sister. He is not able to sleep and claims that he hears noises. All in all, he is an unbalanced man trying to maintain an equilibrium in his life.

**Madeline Usher**

Lady Madeline, twin sister of Roderick Usher, does not speak one word throughout the story. In fact, she is absent from most of the story, and she and the narrator do not stay together in the same room. At the narrator's arrival, she takes to her bed and falls into a
catatonic state. He helps bury her and put her away in a vault, but when she reappears, he flees. Poe seems to present her as a ghostlike figure. Before she was buried, she roamed around the house quietly not noticing anything. According to the narrator, Lady Madeline "passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed [his] presence, disappeared." Overall, Madeline Usher appears to be completely overcome by mental disorder.

Character Summary

The three characters of course are unique people with distinct characters, but they are tied together by the same type of "mental disorder." All of them suffer from insanity, yet each responds differently. Lady Madeline seems to accept the fact that she is insane and continues her life with that knowledge. Roderick Usher appears to realize his mental state and struggles very hard to hold on to his sanity. The narrator, who is slowly but surely contracting the disease, wants to deny what he sees, hears, and senses. He, in the end, escapes from the illness because he flees from the house.
Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

The Open Boat

This story is based on Crane’s own experience, when as a war correspondent, the boat he was travelling on to Cuba sank. He and others spent a number of days drifting in a small boat before reaching land. The story explores the fortitude of men in a shared plight and their companionship in the face of danger. The narrative style is factual and plain, perhaps mirroring the honest practicality of the men in the boat whose story is being narrated. It engenders an admiration of the skilled seamanship and calm demonstrated by the seamen. The drama in the story comes from the waves; the seamen converse, swap roles and encourage each other under the guidance of the captain. When they eventually reach shore, death comes to one of them, who is ‘randomly’ chosen. Without obviously aiming for pathos, Crane achieves it with the oiler’s death. The story, like the seamen, betrays ‘no hurried words, no pallor, no plain agitation’, but achieves a real sense of loss at its conclusion.

Compare with

The Fall of the House of Usher by Edgar Allen Poe

How it Happened by Arthur Conan Doyle

Real Time by Amit Chaudhuri

The Open Boat- Stephen Crane

Published in 1897, “The Open Boat” is based on an actual incident from Stephen Crane’s life in January of that year. While travelling to Cuba to work as a newspaper correspondent, Crane was stranded at sea for thirty hours after his ship, the Commodore, sank off the coast of Florida. As in the story, Crane and three other men were forced to navigate their way ashore in a small boat. One of the men, Billy Higgins, drowned while trying to swim ashore. Soon after his rescue, Crane wrote this story.

The story tells of the trials faced by four men shipwrecked at sea. Crane’s realistic depiction of this life threatening ordeal captures the sensations and emotions of a struggle for survival against the forces of nature. Because of the philosophical speculations, this work is often classified as a work of Naturalism, a literary offshoot of the Realist movement.

‘The Open Boat’ begins with a description of men aboard a small boat on a rough sea. As we read on, details begin to emerge. They are four survivors of a shipwreck: the cook, overweight and sloppily dressed, who is bailing water out of the bottom of the boat; the oiler, a physically powerful man named Billie who is rowing with one oar; the unnamed correspondent, who is rowing with the other oar; and the captain, who lies injured in the bottom of the boat. Each man stares intently at the waves as they threaten to swamp the boat.

A few characteristics become evident to the reader at this point. The cook is the most talkative of the four men; the oiler is a capable seaman. The captain is profoundly sorrowful about the loss of his ship and the possible loss of lives. The correspondent remains less defined than the other characters. The reader learns that the correspondent enters into a debate with the cook about the likelihood of being seen by rescuers or of finding a refuge on shore. They debate the point until the oiler has repeated that they are “not there yet.”
This section features further character development and descriptive passages depicting the small boat’s course across the rough water. The captain briefly expresses his doubt about their chances for survival, but then reassures the men that “we’ll get ashore all right.” The captain is the first to spot a barely visible lighthouse.

The captain improvises a sail using an oar and his coat to give the oiler and correspondent a chance to rest, but the wind dies and they must once again take up rowing. The correspondent begins to think of the absurdity (from his current point of view) of people choosing a rowboat as a form of pleasure. He shares his thoughts with the other men, and the oiler smiles in sympathy. Unwilling to run the risk of swamping the boat the men decide to remain off-shore and wait to be spotted by the lighthouse rescue crew.

The lighthouse appears deserted. The men once again consider rowing ashore and swimming the final distance should the boat capsize closer to the shore. They acknowledge that with the passage of time they are only going to grow weaker. They exchange “addresses and admonitions” in case they each do not live through the ordeal. The narrator offers some musings (not attributed to any particular character) about how unjust it would be to come so far and not make it safely. When the oiler turns the boat towards the shore it quickly becomes apparent that the rougher waters are going to capsize the boat well before the men will have any chance of making to shore. They return to deeper waters where it is slightly calmer. A current takes them away from the lighthouse and they begin to row towards “little dots which seemed to indicate a city on the shore.” The oiler and the correspondent begin taking turns rowing so that they may each rest.

Someone is seen on the shore waving to the men. Soon a crowd gathers, disembarking from a nearby bus. Despite trying to communicate their distress the men come to the realisation that the people on shore must be tourists who think they are out for leisure. The men realise there is no help coming.

The four men spend a cold, wet night rowing towards distant lights. While the correspondent is rowing, the only one awake, a large shark seems to circle the boat. The dark predator is never named as a shark, but is described in terms of its shape, size, speed, and the sound of its dorsal fin slicing the water.

Thoughts of drowning plague the crew. They agonise privately over their situation and the injustice of it. “If I am going to be drowned...why...was I allowed to come thus far?” The repeated phrase is never attributed; it may be the collective inner refrain of the four men. The correspondent recalls (incorrectly) a poem he learnt as a schoolboy and never before understood, about a soldier who dies lamenting that he will never again see his native land.

At dawn, the men decide that their only chance is to row toward the distant shore again and swim when the boat tips. The narrative stays primarily with the correspondent’s thoughts during this passage. He reflects that nature—previously personified as malicious, desiring his death—is in fact indifferent to his fate. On the captain’s order, the oiler rows the boat directly towards the shore. Waves begin to crash into the boat as it enters the breakers. The cook briefly attempts to bail the water out and then the men abandon the boat. The oiler swims strongly and steadily towards the beach. The cook, in his lifejacket and clutching an oar, bobs aimlessly until the captain calls to him to turn over onto his back; in this position he rows himself like a canoe. The correspondent clings to a piece of a lifejacket and paddles slowly, thinking of the vast distance he still has to cover. The injured captain clings to the stern of the upturned boat as it is slowly pushed towards the shore by the strong current. A wave tosses the correspondent over the boat and into waist-deep water but his journey has made him to weak to even stand. Suddenly, a rescuer is on the shore, tossing
off his clothes he enters the water. The rescuer drags the cook to shore and then approaches the captain who waves him instead towards the correspondent. Billie, the oiler, is face down in the shallow water, dead. The three living men are fed and tended to.

**Individual vs. nature:** During the late nineteenth century, Americans had come to expect that they could control and conquer their environment. With the technological breakthroughs of the Industrial Revolution, humankind appeared to have demonstrated its ability to both understand and to dominate the forces of nature. In “The Open Boat,” Crane questions these self-confident assumptions.

The men seem to recognise that they are helpless in the face of nature. Their lives are threatened by a number of natural phenomena; a wave, a current, the wind, a shark, or even simple starvation and exposure. The men are at the mercy of chance. Their realisation profoundly affects the correspondent, who is angered that he might drown despite all of his efforts. “He thought: ‘Am I going to drown? Can it be possible? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?’ Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature.” This passage suggests the absurdity of an individual’s sense of self-importance against the mindless power of nature.

**Perspective:** One of the main themes of the story concerns the limitations of any one perspective, or point of view. The first sentence of this story presents the theme immediately: “None of them knew the color of the sky.” The men in the boat are so focused on the danger presented to them by the waves that they are oblivious to everything else. The story continually emphasises the limitations of a single perspective. When the shipwrecked men are spotted from the shore their waves of distress are misconstrued and the tourists on shore wave happily back.

Crane’s point seems to be that humans can never fully comprehend the true quality of reality, but only their limited view of it. Throughout the story, the situation of the men in the boat seems to them ‘absurd,’ ‘preposterous,’ and without any underlying reason or meaning. Yet once the three survivors are safe they believe that they can look back and ‘interpret’ the import or meaning of what has happened to them. The reader is left to wonder whether anything can ever be truly understood, or if all understanding is simply an agreed-upon, limited perspective that provides the illusion of unity to the chaos of lived events.

**Death:** The drama of the story comes from the characters’ realisation of their own mortality. When interviewed about this story Crane noted that the characters accept a “new ignorance of the grave-edge.” It is interesting that Crane refers to this understanding as ‘ignorance’ rather than knowledge. Being at the mercy of nature, and perhaps even fate, these men must face the fact that their previous beliefs about their own importance had been. The correspondent, in particular, is troubled by the senselessness of his predicament, and he thinks about a poem in which a French soldier dies, unceremoniously, far from his home and family. Facing senseless death, the universe suddenly seems deprived of the meaning he had previously attached to it. Therefore, he is overtaken by a new ‘ignorance’ about life, rather than a new knowledge. Crane seems to endorse the idea that nature is random and senseless by having the oiler drown in the surf. Of all the men, the oiler seemed the most likely to survive, being the fittest. His death implies that the survival of the other characters is the result of good fortune. Once the survivors are safe from danger, however, death’s senselessness is quickly forgotten.

**Free will:** During his life Crane was regarded as a member of the Realist or Naturalist movement. One of the largest concerns of the Naturalist movement was whether human
beings could exercise control over their fate or whether they are powerless to shape external events. These concerns are evident in “The Open Boat.” Although the four men are clearly making the best effort to get to shore, it is never certain until the end whether they will drown. Their fate seems to rest mostly in the hands of forces beyond their control. For example, the correspondent while trying to swim to shore, is trapped in a current (an invisible force) which he can neither understand nor escape. For unknown reasons he is suddenly released and is washed towards the shore. It seems clear that Crane attributes the correspondent’s survival to uncontrollable forces rather than his own efforts.

**Style: Point of View:** Perhaps the literary technique most remarked upon by critics of “The Open Boat” is Crane’s unusual use of shifting point of view. The story is told alternatively from the perspective of each of the crew members, as well as from the vantage point of an objective observer. Often, it is not clear whose viewpoint is predominant at a given time. There are passages of dialogue, too, in which the different speakers are never identified. In these ways, the reader is given the sense that all of the crew members share similar feelings about their predicament. There is also the suggestion that the crew’s reactions are universal; that is, that we would all respond in a similar way. The correspondent is the only character whose internal thoughts are clearly identified. Some critics have stated that the shifting perspectives is a fatal flaw in this story as it hinders character development. However, it can be argued that readers do not need the characters to develop, rather, they need the characters to experience the anger and fear seen. Crane uses clear imagery to capture the sights, sounds, and emotions of a near-death experience so powerful that it is incomprehensible to the characters. For each of the characters the ability possibility of death seems unjust and senseless. Only in the end can they begin to ‘interpret’ their experience, yet the reader is not privy to their conclusions. Thus, the shifting point of view appears to emphasise the failure of interpretation by all of the characters, rather than the knowledge that each has gained.

Symbolism: Nature is represented by the sea, the wind, the cold and the shark that periodically swims near the boat. The nearly helpless men in the boat can be seen as a metaphor for all people before the forces of nature.

**Figures of speech: Find examples of the following**

- Alliteration
- Metaphor
- Onomatopoeia
- Oxymoron
- Simile

1. Imagery: The world of the men in the lifeboat takes on mainly cheerless hues- black, white, grey, slate- that intensify a sense of forboding. Read through the story and highlight examples of this.
2. Circle or underline phrases you find curt, that represent repetitive themes or images and reveal figurative languages.
3. List colours associated with nature and colours associated with humanity.
4. The men in the boat fit into certain types. Highlight lines in the story revealing the character of each man- note the stereotype and elaborate on it.
5. Crane frequently employs personification and anthropomorphism. Underline examples and note their significance.
6. The narration fluctuates from third person limited to third person omniscient. Note examples. Why is this significant.
7. Discuss repetition within the story. Why are some words and lines repeated? Particularly consider, “If I am going to be drowned…”
8. How does the end of the story reveal irony. How does it enhance the Naturalist theme of the story?
HG Wells (1866-1946)

The Door in the Wall

As well as famous novels such as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*, HG Wells wrote numerous short stories, many of which show the author’s interest in fantasy and the improbable, but a feature of the stories is the way in which Wells creates a sense of truthfulness in his narratives. This was demonstrated when a radio broadcast of an adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938 caused panic in New York, and can also be seen in the narrator’s concern with the truth of the story at the beginning of *The Door in the Wall*.

Here the narrator is retelling the story of someone else, who in turn tells it to him with ‘such direct simplicity of conviction’. This creates a tension which remains throughout the story, which on the one hand is ‘frankly incredible’ while we are assured that ‘it was a true story’. The temporary childhood escape into the paradisiacal garden is evoked with nostalgic longing, but remains inexplicable. The character’s final death leaves questions for the reader; it is either another inexplicable event, or some kind of solution to the mystery.

Compare with

*The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allen Poe

*The Signalman* by Charles Dickens

*The Moving Finger* by Edith Wharton

H.G. Wells’ short story “The Door in the Wall” was first published in 1911 as part of a collection titled *The Door in the Wall, and Other Stories*. The conflict between science and imagination is the major theme of the story, which was enormously popular when it first appeared. Today Wells’ reputation rests almost entirely upon his science fiction novels, which include *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), all of which are acknowledged classics of the science fiction genre and continue to be widely read and adapted. “The Door in the Wall” is considered by readers and critics alike to be Wells’ finest short story.

“*The Door in the Wall*” examines an issue that is reflected in much of Wells’ writing: the contrast between aesthetics and science and the difficulty of choosing between them. The protagonist, Lionel Wallace, possesses a vivid imagination but goes into politics, where he is considered extremely rational. The story suggests both the magic and the danger of a nostalgia for a buried time. It is a story about politician Wallace who, while growing up in a joyless home, discovers a door in a wall leading to an enchanted garden. Wallace’s inability to bridge the gap between his imagination and his rational, scientific side leads to his death.

Plot: Confiding to his friend Redmond who narrates “The Door in the Wall,” Lionel Wallace relates that a preoccupation is gradually coming to dominate his life, one that is even affecting his career as a successful politician. Long ago as a lonely child of five he had wandered out of his home into the streets of West Kensington in London, where he noticed a green door set in a white wall. It was very attractive to him, and he wanted to open it, but at the same time he felt that his father would be very angry if he did. Wallace’s father is described as “a stern preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention and expected great things of him.” Wallace’s mother was dead, and he was being raised by a governess. Nevertheless, the young Wallace gives in to the temptation and finds himself in an
enchanted garden. Wallace describes the garden as a child's paradise with an inspiring atmosphere. The garden’s colours are clean and bright, and the child is filled with happiness. There are various animals, including two tame panthers, beautiful flowers, and shady trees. Wallace meets a tall, fair girl who “came to meet me, smiling, and said ‘Well? To me, and lifted me and kissed me, and put me down and led me by the hand.” He meets other children and they play games together, although he cannot remember the games, a fact which later causes him much distress.

A woman begins to read a book to the boy, and soon it becomes apparent that the story she is telling is that of his own life. When the book reaches the point in his life at which Wallace finds himself outside the green door, the enchanted world vanishes, and the boy finds himself once more on the dismal West Kensington street in London.

Wallace tells his father about the garden and is punished for telling his father what he assumes is a lie. In time, and as a result of the punishment, Wallace succeeds in suppressing the memory. But he can never quite forget it completely and often dreams of revisiting the garden. Throughout his life he unexpectedly comes upon the door in the wall in different parts of London, but each time he rushes to an important commitment of one sort or another and does not stop to open it.

Wallace tells his friend Redmond that three times in the past year he has seen the door, and on each occasion he has passed it by: once because he was on his way to a vital division in the House of Commons; once, significantly, because he was hurrying to his father’s deathbed and once because he wished, for reasons of personal ambition, to continue a conversation with a colleague. Now his soul “is full of unappeasable regrets,” and he is barely capable of working. One morning a few months later, Wallace is found dead, having apparently mistaken a door at a dangerous constructive site for the elusive door in the wall.

Alienation and Loneliness: Whether Wallace’s tale about the garden is true is of less significance than the fact that it is a metaphor for his alienation and loneliness. Wallace’s mother died when he was born, and his father was stern and expected great things of him. The treatment Wallace received as a child forced him to retreat into a private world of imagination. The only place where he could find love and attention was through the door in the wall. Wallace was forced as a child to repress his imagination: “I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence. Then... everyone was forbidden to listen to me, to hear a word about it.” Because he had to retreat into a private world just so he could use his imagination, alienation and loneliness became familiar feelings for Wallace. These feelings persist throughout his life and make it difficult for him to connect with other people.

Insanity: Initially, Remond is unsure whether he should believe his friend’s tale: “But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess.” The reader is more willing to believe Wallace’s fantastic story because it is filtered through the sensible, “sane” voice of the narrator. Redmond fits the preconceived notion of a sane person in that he seems to have a normal, healthy mind, makes sound, rational judgements, and shows good sense. Wallace seems just as sane at first; he does not fit the stereotype of an insane person because he holds a prestigious job and seems successful. Wells’ intention was not to develop an insane character but to show the consequences of having to separate the various components of one's personality. As a child Wallace was forced to suppress his imagination, and he continues to carry this forward into his adult life. Therefore, Wallace begins to view his childhood not as imaginary but as real, and this is the only way Wallace
can accept this part of himself. He is no longer able to differentiate between real and imaginary, since the imaginary is off limits to him. In the end, it may seem that Wallace has gone insane—mistaking a door at a railway construction site for the magical door in the wall—but he is merely trying to return to that brief time in the garden when he was allowed to be himself.

**Public versus Private:** In his public life, Wallace is a successful Cabinet Minister in the British government. He is trusted and respected. Redmond, the narrator, holds Wallace in the highest esteem. The morning after Wallace tells Redmond the fantastic story, Redmond says, “I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focused shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him.” Because Wallace is a politician, he is skilful at speaking and presenting himself, which is why Redmond believes him. It is not until Redmond is alone that he begins to question the tale. In private, Wallace is not so competent; he longs for the enchanted garden, that special place behind the wall that he has never known in his public life. His father has raised him to be rational and dull, cold and interested only in his career. Redmond says “what a woman once said of him—a woman who had loved him greatly. ‘Suddenly,’ she said, ‘the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn’t care a rap for you—under his very nose.’” Wallace, like many people raised in repressive environments such as Victorian England, is unable to unite his public and private selves into one balanced person.

**Point of view:** “The Door in the Wall” is told from the point of view of Redmond, Wallace’s friend. Redmond speaks in the first person as he relates Wallace’s story. At first, Redmond does not know if he should believe his friend’s wild tale: “But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess.” The reader is more willing to believe Wallace’s fantastic story because it is filtered through the sensible, trustworthy voice of Redmond, the narrator. This particular point of view also allows the reader to find out about Wallace’s demise, something that would not have been possible if Wallace told the story himself, although it prevents readers from knowing what Wallace’s final thoughts were.

**Symbols:** Many of Wells’ symbols are dreamlike and represent masculine and feminine forces: “There was,’ he said, ’a crimson Virginia creeper- all one bright uniform crimson, in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow... and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new fallen.” The white wall is a feminine symbol representing Wallace’s desire to be nurtured, which he has repressed since the death of his mother. The white wall is contrasted with the “clear amber sunshine,” a symbol for the masculine ego for the dominant and logical as opposed to the passive and emotional. The symbolic colours in this passage reinforce the contrasting masculine/feminine symbols on which so much of the story hinges. The amber sunshine and red creeper (masculine, virile, dominant) is juxtaposed with the whiteness of the wall (moon, feminine). The green door symbolises fertility; it is the colour associated with the Roman and Greek goddesses of love, Venus and Aphrodite. In opening the door and entering the world beyond his father’s domain, Wallace passes into the feminine realm of imagination and sympathy. The door itself is a common literary symbol that represents the passageway between the conscious and the unconscious.

**Metaphor:** It is irrelevant whether the tale Wallace weaves is in fact true; it is more important that the tale serves as a metaphor for Wallace’s alienation and loneliness. Wallace spends his life longing to return to the enchanted garden, where he knew love and
joy that comes with using one’s imagination. In his everyday life, these things were frowned upon. Therefore, the story is a metaphor for Wallace’s desire to return to an innocent, beautiful time and place.
Maurice Shadbolt (1932-1985)

The People Before

Maurice Shadbolt is one of the towering figures of New Zealand literature, winning numerous awards and accolades for his work, much of which examines the history of the country through narrative. The central characters in this story are carving out a farming existence on the land, and the importance of land ownership to the family is made apparent in a number of phrases in the story. The narrator tells us that ‘my father took on that farm’, he refers to the importance of ‘Land of your own,’ which becomes ‘your own little kingdom’. The suggestions of the history of the land come through the discovery of the greenstone adzes and attitudes to the land are brought to the fore with the visit of the Maori group. Although Shadbolt characterises Tom Taikaka as pleasant, courteous and patient, there is the constant underlying acknowledgement of the Europeans’ displacing of the Maori from their land. Jim’s attempt at restoring the greenstone to Tom is symbolic of an attempt at restitution, and the reader is left to interpret Tom’s reluctant refusal. The return of the Maori elder to the land in death, and his disappearance, is another indication of his unity with the landscape and again demonstrates the different attitudes to land held by the Maoris and the Europeans, attitudes which remain polarised in the brothers at the end of the story.

Compare with

Journey by Patricia Grace

Her First Ball by Katherine Mansfield

The Enemy by VS Naipaul

Maurice Shadbolt

“Prolific writer of novels and short stories who dominated the literary life of his native New Zealand

IN A WRITING career spanning more than four decades Maurice Shadbolt made a major and lasting contribution to New Zealand literature, to New Zealanders’ understanding of themselves, to others’ understanding of New Zealand and its people, and to New Zealand’s literary and artistic community.

A documentary film director in the 1950s, also an award-winning short story writer, Shadbolt completed his first book of stories, The New Zealanders, while living in London in 1959. Publication in London was soon followed by American, German and Italian editions. Critical acclaim was immediate: The Times Literary Supplement described him as “a figure to be spoken of in the same breath as Patrick White of Australia”.

Eleven novels, a volume of novellas, three more collections of stories, a play, two volumes of autobiography and a number of works of non-fiction followed. Every work of fiction has been published in New Zealand and the UK, most have also been published in the US and many have been translated, especially into Italian and German. His triptych of revisionist-historical novels — Season of the Jew (1986), Monday’s Warriors (1990), House of Strife (1993) — form perhaps the most important work of historical fiction by a New Zealand writer. All have received considerable popular and critical acclaim, with The New York Times describing Season of the Jew as one of the top books for 1987. Shadbolt’s drama (Once on Chunuk Bair) and non-fiction (especially Voices of Gallipoli) continued his focus on New Zealand’s post-colonial identity.
Maurice Francis Richard Shadbolt was born in Auckland on June 4, 1932, and educated at Avondale College and Auckland University College. He started work as a journalist before becoming a scriptwriter and documentary film-maker with the National Film Unit. He went to Europe in 1957, and it was in Britain, two years later, that his first collection of stories was published.

He continued to mine the seam of contemporary New Zealand for some 20 years with another collection of short stories and four novels, of which Strangers and Journeys (1972) was widely greeted as “the great New Zealand novel”. By the late 1970s he was began to turn his attention to history and the country’s past, starting with The Lovelock Version (1980).

Shadbolt won numerous fellowships and almost every big New Zealand literary prize, some more than once: he is the only New Zealander to win the Katherine Mansfield Memorial Award three times, in 1963, 1967 and 1995. He also won the New Zealand Book Award in 1981 and a Montana New Zealand Fiction Honour Award in 1996. In 1989 he was appointed CBE for his services to New Zealand literature; in 1990 he received the Commemoration Medal for services to New Zealand; and in 1997 he was appointed an honorary doctor of literature at the University of Auckland. In the same year, which also saw the publication of his last novel, Dove on the Waters, he announced that he was suffering from Alzheimer’s disease.

In his prime he was a key figure and advocate for the recognition and promotion of New Zealand literature, and he lobbied for better terms and conditions for writers. In addition to serving on the executive and as president of PEN, he was active in his support of other writers; where he was convinced of the merit of someone’s work he would offer concrete advice and assistance.

He was clever, vibrant, opinionated and larger than life. He always had a delicious sense of irony, a great kitbag of stories — many mocking himself — and literary gossip, although his closest friends were as likely to be painters and potters as they were fellow writers.

Shadbolt was married four times: to Gillian Heming, Barbara Magner, Bridget Armstrong, and Elspeth Sandys. He had five children.

**Maurice Shadbolt, CBE, writer, was born on June 4, 1932, and died on October 10, 2004, aged 72.” Obituary from New Zealand Herald- October 12, 2004.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Events occur in a chronological order with the narrator predominantly reflecting on the past. This results in the majority of the story being told in the third person.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Remote farmland in New Zealand’s Far North in the years between WWI and WWII</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>See below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td><strong>Father:</strong> ‘Good Kiwi bloke’ who has fought with and toiled upon the land to make a sustainable life for himself and his family. He regrets his lack of education but looks upon on his younger sons focus on education as a waste describing him as ‘soft’. The lifestyle he has chosen for himself and his family is a hard one and his oldest son (the narrator) is a reflection of him. He is a traditional man that readily shares stories with his sons. He has his own traditions and is</td>
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comfortable with his way of life until this is disturbed by the arrival of Tom and his whanau. The arrival of the Maori characters shows the Father’s racism and lack of understanding for those who are different.

**Eldest son (narrator):** ‘Father’s boy” a replica of his father.

**Second son- Jim:** ‘Small’; ‘Mother’s boy”; “softy”; “quiet”; “slow” (Look at the connotations associated with these descriptions- they suggest to the reader that the narrator is a reflection of his father.) In later life he becomes a university lecturer. He is sensitive and far more spiritual than his brother or father- he offers to return the greenstone adzes he finds in his explorations around the farm- to areas that his father sees as useless because he cannot farm them.

**Mother:** Over-ruled by her husband and surroundings. Her opinions like her faded quietly and died.

**Tom:** a ‘modern’ Maori. He has a connection to and understanding of the culture of his people but straddles both worlds- European and Maori. While the land they return to may have traditionally been a place of spiritual significance to his people the old man that he accompanies is the last one of his people to have been born there suggesting that Tom and his whanau have lost their connection to their tribal home.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Ownership- who owns the land and how is this defined?</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Ignorance- cultural (European and Maori)</td>
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<td>Prejudice</td>
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<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Colloquial idioms “song for your supper”, “got the farm for a song”.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imagery- simile and metaphors</td>
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<td>Contrast- how the land is seen by each culture.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Symbolism</td>
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Plot:
The story begins with the narrator telling the back story about how his father came to own the remote farm which was the last piece of flat land on the river. The narrator talks about the importance of the land to his father as it gave him independence. He also discusses him growing up working on the farm while his brother (Jim) stayed inside more often and later became a scholar. Once when he and Jim went exploring in the hills of the farm Jim found some greenstone which he recognised were from the Maoris. As the depression descended on the family the narrator's father began to lose hope in his land and became gripped with the idea that he had failed himself. The narrator's mother receives a phone call from people who claim that they are the people who used to live on the land and they want to visit the farm.

When the visitors arrive they are surprised to see that they are Maoris as they had not known that Maoris used to own the land. The Maoris had with them an old man who was the last person in their tribe which grew up on this land. The old man wanted to see the hills once more before he died. The Maoris set up a camp in the hills and stayed over night. The next day the Maoris came down the hill without the old man as he had died in the hills and they had left him there. Later the narrator explains that he could feel the presence of the old man in the hills. The family sell the farm and buy another farm elsewhere. Jim becomes a professor and the narrator a farmer. When the narrator and his brother discuss what they fixed their minds on when fighting the war, Jim discloses that he had thought of their old land where the old man had died. The narrator had been unable to think of anything and feels cheated that the one place he had thought of his own belonged more to his brother.

Setting: as above- See description below:

"Scrub and jagged black humps on the hills, bush in gullies where fire hadn't reached; hills and more hills, deep valleys with caves and twisting rivers, and mountains white with winter in the distance. We had the last piece of really flat land on the river."

Characters:

Narrator's father: Main influence in narrator's life, narrator gains some of his perspectives on life from his father - he takes after his father more than his mother - "I remained my father's."

Idiom "for a song" is initially misunderstood by the narrator because "there wasn't much room for singing in my father's life... There was room for plodding his paddocks in all weathers, milking cows and sending cream down river to the dairy factory, and cursing the bloody Government; there was room in his life for all these things and more, but not for singing."

Dialogue "Don't be difficult', he'd say. "Life's difficult enough, boy, without all your damn questions."

Simile "Questions were a disorderly intrusion, like gorse or weed springing up on good pasture." Comparison is made to what the father values highly-his land. The father likes to be in control, as can be seen by the upkeep of his farm. "He didn't strut or boast, though; he just pointed them out quietly, these jobs well done. He wanted other people to share his satisfaction."
• Physical description: "He wasn't a big man, but he was wiry and thin with a lean face and cool blue eyes; he was one of those people who can't keep still."

• The quote "now most of the fighting was done, he sometimes found it quite an effort to keep busy" coupled with the idea that "he always found some reason for us not to get away" hints at the father's inability to forget his war experiences. The maintenance of his farm thus prevents his mind from dwelling on the war.

• "He detested softies, even the accomplices of softies." This is due to his upbringing, and growing up milking two hundred cows at "eight years old and thin as a rake."

• Although he did not complete his schooling, "he could out-argue most people; probably out-fight them too."

• He is independent and strong-willed - "I'd bend my head to no man. And you know what the secret to that is, boy? Land. Land of your own."

• The land is important because "the knowledge that he'd built where someone else had failed; part was that he'd given too much of himself there, to be really free anywhere else. It wouldn't be the same, walking on to another successful farm, a going concern, everything in order...That was why he felt so secure."

• He is suspicious when the Maoris end up on his land - "his opinion of Maoris: they were lazy, drank too much, and caused trouble. They just rode on the backs of men on the land, like the loafers in the cities."

• Important perspective: "So far as he was concerned, history only began the day he first set foot on the land. It was his, by sweat and legal title: that was all that mattered. That was all that could matter."

**The Narrator:**

• "...I was the elder son."

• Whereas Jim has a spiritual connection with the land, the narrator does not. Hence, he feels "robbed of something which was rightfully mine" when Jim describes the adzes as souvenirs from the farm.

• "I didn't mind working on the farm all day, with my father; it was, after all, what I'd always wanted" shows that the narrator carries the same devotion to the land as his father.

• He is always eager to please his father and has self-control. "If I could have done so without upsetting my father, I would have run down to meet the launch, eager with curiosity."

• He is considerate, as is shown by his treatment of his brother who is considered to weak to milk the cows.

• He enjoys shooting, which contrasts with Jim.

**Jim:**

• Dialogue "He's not a softy. He's just not very big. That's all."

• "...Jim became his mother's boy."
"As he grew older Jim turned more into himself, and became still quieter. You could never guess exactly what he was thinking. It wasn’t that he didn’t enjoy life; he just had his own way of enjoying it.

"...Jim never showed great enthusiasm for shooting."

"He gathered leaves, and tried to identify the plants from which the leaves came. He collected stones, those of some interesting shape or texture; he had a big collection of stones."

"He wasn’t too slow and quiet at school, though: he was faster than most of us with an answer."

Sign of brotherhood: "He was never too busy with his books to come along with me on Sundays."

The father can no longer make Jim conform to his values - "Jim was entirely surrendered at last, to the house and books, to school and my mother."

Tom:

Maori.

Unlike the father, the Maori are connected spiritually to the land.

He has "never been here before" but recognises the hill the Maoris inhabited because "they described it so well I could find the place blindfold. All the stories of our tribe are connected with that hill."

The Importance of Land ownership

Land equals the independence of individuals. Owning land is important so that you don't have to bend down to others. When you have your own land you don’t have to work for others. His father’s land is described as “his own little kingdom” and “his castle, the farmhouse.” Ruling over his land is equal to ruling over his own kingdom.

“I'd bend my head to no man. And you know what the secret of that is, boy? Land. Land of your own. You're independent, boy. You can say no to the world. That's if you got your own little kingdom.”

the importance of owning land in New Zealand culture—back then it was difficult to make a living in NZ apart from working on the land or owning animals.

Europeans displacing the Maori from their land

The land had belonged to the Maoris before the Europeans had taken the land away by force. This suggests that the Maoris were the true owners of the land. Their history with the land ran deeper.

“All the stories of our tribe are connected with that hill. That's where we lived, up there, for hundreds of years.”

Jim tried to give the adzes he had found to Tom (one of the Maoris) as he felt that they belonged to them. The adzes symbolise the land and shows that everyone believes deep down that the land should still rightfully belong to the Maori as their spiritual connection with the land is much stronger.
Although Tom told Jim that he should keep the adzes because they were on his land now, it is apparent that Tom really wants to keep the adzes. This can be seen as the Maoris wanting their land back but being too polite to ask for it back.

Not only did the Europeans displace the Maoris from their land but the fact that Tom’s tribe had lived in the hills for hundreds of years suggests that the Europeans had also robbed the Maoris of their heritage (all their stories were about the land).

Contrasting Attitudes about the land held by the Maoris and Europeans

- The Maoris are spiritually united with the land, this is shown by the old man dying in the land he loves and the family still being able to feel his presence in the hills. Jim’s attitude toward the land is like the Maoris, he enjoys the beauty of the land unlike the narrator and his father who hold typical European views towards the land. They see the land only as property and something to be proud of.

- “it was his, by sweat and legal title: that was all that mattered. That was all that could matter.”

- The father was only proud of his land when it yielded good crops and the farming was going well. Later as the depression sunk in, he lost hope in the land. On the other had the Maoris viewed the land as their home rather than a source of income. The narrator’s father was able to leave the farm behind easily, he did not miss the land. In comparison the Maoris only left their land because they were forced to by the Europeans, they would never have left the land as easily as the narrator’s father. This shows the Maoris connection and unity with the land. To the Maoris the land was part of them.

- The narrator’s father is only concerned about materialistic ownership, not spiritual ownership.

- His father had owned the land for a long time but did not know about the cave in the hills, this shows he does not really know the land unlike the Maoris.

- This is reinforced in the end of the story when it is revealed that the brother was able to picture this land as he fought in the war while the narrator was unable to. Although the narrator had worked on the land for longer and spent more time on it, his brother was more connected with the land because of the loving attitude which he held towards the land. “For one black moment it seemed I had been robbed of something which was rightfully mine. I don't think I’ll ever forgive him.”

- The narrator acts as a middleman to show contrast between father and son.

- The story is written from past to present in present tense.
RK Narayan (1906-2001)

A Horse and Two Goats

Narayan has written numerous novels and short stories, many of them set in Malgudi, a fictional but typical small Indian town. His characters are invariably ordinary people finding their route through Indian life. Although A Horse and Two Goats makes no reference to Malgudi itself, it is typical of these stories, as Muni tries to live and ease the burden of his poverty. The story is narrated with the non-judgemental understanding and gentle humour typical of Narayan’s writing.

The narration emphasises the insignificance of the village, and by implication the insignificance of its central character, who is coping with poverty and domestic struggle and seeks to ease his way by deceit and invention. The big deceit of the story, though, happens through misunderstanding and without Muni’s volition, Narayan creating comedy through the two parallel lines of attempted dialogue between Muni and the American tourist. Within the comedy, though, Narayan shows the different values of the two, the American’s dialogue concerned with acquisition and possessions, while Muni is concerned with history and spirituality.

Compare with

Games at Twilight by Anita Desai

Of White Hairs and Cricket by Rohinton Mistry

First published in the Madras, India, newspaper The Hindu in 1960, “A Horse and Two Goats” did not achieve a wide international audience until 1970 when it became the title story of R. K. Narayan’s seventh collection of short stories, A Horse and Two Goats and Other Stories. It reached an even wider audience in 1985 when it was included in Under the Banyan Tree, Narayan’s tenth and best-selling collection. By this time Narayan was well established as one of the most prominent Indian authors writing in English in the twentieth century. The story presents a comic dialogue between Muni, a poor Tamil-speaking villager, and a wealthy English-speaking businessman from New York. They are engaged in a conversation in which neither can understand the other’s language. With gentle humor, Narayan explores the conflicts between rich and poor, and between Indian and Western culture.

Narayan is best known for his fourteen novels, many of which take place in the fictional town of Malgudi. Many of the stories in his thirteen short story collections also take place in Malgudi, but “A Horse and Two Goats” does not. This accounts for the fact that the story has attracted very little critical commentary; however, all of the attention it has drawn has been positive. The story is seen as a fine example of Narayan’s dexterity in creating engaging characters and humorous dialogue, but it is not considered one of his greatest works.

Set in Kritam, “probably the tiniest” of India’s 700,000 villages, “A Horse and Two Goats” opens with a clear picture of the poverty in which the protagonist Muni lives. Of the thirty houses in the village, only one, the Big House, is made of brick. The others, including Muni’s, are made of “bamboo thatch, straw, mud, and other unspecified materials.” There is no running water and no electricity, and Muni’s wife cooks their typical breakfast of “a handful of millet flour” over a fire in a mud pot. On this day, Muni has shaken down six drumsticks (a local name for a type of horse radish) from the drumstick tree growing in front of his house,
and he asks his wife to prepare them for him in a sauce. She agrees, provided he can get the other ingredients, none of which they have in the house: rice, dhall (lentils), spices, oil and a potato.

Muni and his wife have not always been so poor. Once, when he considered himself prosperous, he had a flock of forty sheep and goats which he would lead out to graze every day. But life has not been kind to him or to his flocks: years of drought, a great famine, and an epidemic that ran through Muni’s flock have taken their toll. And as a member of the lowest of India’s castes, Muni was never permitted to go to school or to learn a trade. Now he is reduced to two goats, too scrawny to sell or to eat. He and his wife have no children to help them in their old age, so their only income is from the odd jobs his wife occasionally takes on at the Big House. Muni has exhausted his credit at every shop in town, and today, when he asks a local shopman to give him the items his wife requires to cook the drumsticks, he is sent away humiliated.

There is no other food in the house, so Muni’s wife sends him away with the goats. “Fast till the evening,” she tells him. “I’ll do you good.” Muni takes the goats to their usual spot a few miles away: a grassy area near the highway, where he can sit in the shade of a life-sized statue of a horse and a warrior and watch trucks and buses go by. The statue is made of weather-beaten clay and has stood in the same spot for all of Muni’s seventy or more years. As Muni watches the road and waits for the appropriate time to return home, a yellow station wagon comes down the road and pulls over. A red-faced American man dressed in khaki clothing gets out and is asking Muni where to find the nearest gas station when he notices the statue, which he finds “marvelous.” Muni’s first impulse is to run away, assuming from the khaki that this foreigner must be a policeman or a soldier. But Muni is too old to run any more, and he cannot leave the goats. The two begin to converse—if “conversation” can be used to describe what happens when two people speak to each other in separate languages, neither understanding the other. “Namaste! How do you do?” the American says in greeting, using his only Indian word. Muni responds with the only English he knows: “Yes, no.”

The American, a businessman from New York City, lights a cigarette and offers one to Muni, who knows about cigarettes but has never had one before. He offers Muni his business card, but Muni fears it is a warrant of some kind. Muni launches into a long explanation of his innocence of whatever crime the man is investigating, and the American asks questions about the horse statue, which he would like to buy. He tells Muni about a bad day at work, when he was forced to work for four hours without elevators or electricity, and seems completely unaware that Muni lives this way every day. By now he is convinced that Muni is the owner of the statue, which he is determined to buy.

The two talk back and forth, each about his own life. Muni remembers his father and grandfather telling about the statue and the ancient story it depicts, and tries to explain to the American how old it is. “I get a kick out of every word you utter,” the American replies. Muni reminisces about his difficult and impoverished childhood working in the fields, and the American laughs heartily. Muni interprets the statue: “This is our guardian. . . . At the end of Kali Yuga, this world and all other worlds will be destroyed, and the Redeemer will come in the shape of a horse.” The American replies, “I assure you this will have the best home in the U.S.A. I’ll push away the bookcase. . . . The TV may have to be shifted. . . . I don’t see how that can interfere with the party—we’ll stand around him and have our drinks.” It is clear that even if the two could understand each other’s words, they could not understand each other’s worlds.
Finally, the American pushes one hundred rupees into Muni’s hand—twenty times Muni’s debt with the shopkeeper. He considers that he has bought the horse, and Muni believes he has just sold his goats. Muni runs home to present the money to his wife, while the American flags down a truck, gets help breaking the horse off its pedestal, and drives away with his purchase. Muni’s wife does not believe her husband’s story about where the money came from, and her suspicions only increase when the goats find their way home. As the story ends, she is shrieking at him, and Muni appears to be not much better off than he was at the start.

The man- American Tourist
The man comes riding into the story in a yellow station wagon. A businessman who works in New York and commutes from Connecticut, he is dressed in the khaki clothing worn by American tourists in the tropics. He typifies the “Ugly American”: he speaks only English, but is surprised and a little annoyed to find that Muni can speak only Tamil, and although he is in the tiniest village in India, he expects to find a gas station and English-speaking goatherds. Once he sees the statue of the horse, he must own it for his living room, with no thought for what the statue might mean or who might value it. Even when he can’t speak the language, he knows that money talks.

Muni
Muni, an old and desperately poor man, is the protagonist of the story. Once he was prosperous, with a large flock of sheep, but a series of misfortunes have left him with only two scrawny goats. He and his wife have almost no income and no children to help take care of them. Every day, Muni takes the goats out to graze on the scarce grass outside of town, while his wife pulls something together for an evening meal. As he watches the goats from the shade of a large statue, he remembers his younger days when the work was hard but there was enough to eat, when he could not attend school because he was not of the right caste, and when he imagined that he would one day have children. Like many poor and struggling people, he fears authority figures, and so he fears the American who steps out of a strange car wearing khaki clothes. While the man tries to talk with him about the statue, Muni babbles on about a recent murder and the end of the world. At the end he seems to have temporarily escaped his money troubles, but his bad luck continues when his wife suspects him of thievery and threatens to leave.

The shopman
The shopman is a moody man who has given Muni food on credit in the past, but who has been pushed past his limit. Muni owes him five rupees, and although they share a bit of humorous conversation, the shopman will not give him any more.

The wife
Muni’s wife has spent some sixty years with him (neither of them is sure about their ages), through prosperity and poverty. Although she is gruff with him now, she is willing to indulge his request for a special meal. She works as hard as he does, or harder, getting up at dawn to fix his morning meal, and taking odd jobs at the Big House when their stores are low. But poverty has worn her down: her first reaction when she sees the hundred rupees is to accuse Muni of stealing.

Culture Clash
The most important theme in “A Horse and Two Goats,” and in fact the central theme of Narayan’s work, is the clash of cultures, specifically the clash of Indian and Western cultures. Using humor instead of anger, Narayan demonstrates just how far apart the two worlds are: the two cultures exist in the same time and space, but literally and metaphorically speak
different languages. The two main characters in this story couldn’t be more different: Muni is poor, rural, uneducated, Hindu, brown; the American is wealthy, urban, educated, probably Judeo-Christian, white. As a good Hindu, Muni calmly accepts the hand that fate has dealt him, while the American is willing and able to take drastic and sudden action to change his life (for example, flying off to India, or throwing away his return plane ticket to transport a horse statue home on a ship). Each man is quite ignorant of the other’s way of life.

Unlike many stories about culture clash, the inability to communicate in this story leads only to confusion, not to any real harm. In fact, although each feels vaguely dissatisfied with the conversation, the men do not realize that they are not communicating. Each speaks at length about his own life and local calamities, with no awareness that the other hears nothing. At the end of their encounter each man has what he wants or needs, and neither man has lost anything of value. As an Indian who writes only in English, Narayan himself has experienced the ways in which Indian and Western cultures conflict. While this conflict may be painful at times, here he finds it merely amusing.

**Wealth and Poverty**

Although they have little in common, the most important way in which Muni and the American differ is in their respective level of wealth. Narayan takes great pains in the opening of the story to show how desperately poor Muni is, and to emphasize that even in his time of “prosperity” his standard of living was still greatly below that of most Americans. The American takes for granted his relative wealth and seems unaware of the difference between Muni and himself. He casually offers cigarettes to a man who has never seen one, complains about four hours without air conditioning to a man who has never had electricity, brags about enjoying manual labor as a Sunday hobby to a man who grew up working in the fields from morning until night, and without a thought gives Muni enough money to open a business. He is not trying to show off; he simply accepts his wealth as his right. His very casualness emphasizes the gap between them. Narayan in no way condemns the man for being wealthy, or for not stepping in to aid the poor Muni, but he wants the two men and their relative wealth to be clear, so the reader can evaluate the relationship between wealth and worth.

**Knowledge and Ignorance**

In a small way, “A Horse and Two Goats” explores the different ways that a person can be educated. Muni, who grew up a member of a lower caste at a time when only the Brahmin, the highest caste, could attend school, has had no formal education. He has not traveled beyond his village, and he likes to watch trucks and buses go by on the highway a few miles away so that he can have “a sense of belonging to a larger world.” He does not even know his own age. He does, however, have an impressive amount of knowledge of the two major texts of his literary heritage, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which he has learned by acting in plays and by listening to speakers at the temple. He knows the stories, and he is able to mine them for truth and wisdom when he needs them.

The American, on the other hand, has had the full benefits of an American education. He has a roomful of books that he values as objects (“you know I love books and am a member of five book clubs, and the choice and bonus volumes mount up to a pile in our living room”), but there is no evidence that he understands or values what is inside them. On one level, he is familiar with the larger world around him in a way that Muni never will be. However, even on this trip to India “to look at other civilizations,” he does not seem to be looking at India for what it is, but only for a reflection of—and ornaments for—his own life. The uneducated
Muni tries to tell him the significance of the horse statue, but the American sees it only as a living room decoration. Of course, the language barrier prevents him from receiving Muni’s interpretation, but it never even crosses his mind to ask. In this story, there are at least two ways to be ignorant.

Point of View and Narration
“A Horse and Two Goats” is narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator who reports clearly and objectively on the characters’ words, actions, and memories, but who does not comment or judge. The narrator describes Kritam’s erosion and Muni’s decline dispassionately, without regret; conversations between Muni and his wife, or Muni and the shopman, are told from Muni’s perspective, but with his calm acceptance of whatever fate brings him. This restraint is important to the understated humor of the dialogue between Muni and the American; Narayan trusts the reader to interpret the absurd conversation without his having to say through his narrator, “Notice that this response has nothing to do with the question asked,” or “See the irony in this remark.” When the two men leave the place where they met, each taking away something of value, neither has been accused by the narrator—nor by the reader—of foolishness or evil. By creating a narrator who tells the story without judging it, Narayan presents two believable characters with human flaws, but two characters for whom the reader can feel compassion and sympathy nonetheless. The conflict is between two likeable characters, or two worthy cultures, not between good and evil.

Setting
The story takes place in Kritam, “probably the tiniest” of India’s 700,000 villages. Its four streets are lined with about thirty mud and thatch huts and one Big House, made of brick and cement. Women cook in clay pots over clay stoves, and the huts have no running water or electricity. A few miles away, down a rough dirt track through dry fields of cactus and lantana bushes, is a highway leading to the mountains, where a large construction project is being completed. The meeting between Muni and the red-faced man was intended to take place between about 1945, when televisions became generally available to Americans, and 1960, when the story was published, but the date is not central to the story. Even today there are many villages in the world without modern technological conveniences, and many travelers who do not realize that not everyone lives as they do.

Realism
Narayan’s fiction is often noted for its realism, its simple and accurate presentation of common, everyday life as it is lived by identifiable characters. In “A Horse and Two Goats” Narayan pays careful attention to the small details of Muni’s life: where he lives, what he eats, how he coughs when he smokes his first cigarette. Although many of the small details, like the drumstick tree and the dhoti where Muni puts his hundred rupees, are particularly Indian, they are also basic enough to human experience that they are easily understood by an international audience. Narayan’s characters and stories are read not so much as regional literature but as universal.

Humor
Humor is an important element in “A Horse and Two Goats,” and understanding Narayan’s humor is important to understanding his world view. Humor, which is affectionate and sympathetic to humanity and human foibles, is often distinguished from wit, which looks more harshly on human fallibility. For Narayan, who looks at the world through the lens of his Hindu faith, weakness and strife are to be accepted and transcended, not railed against. When he creates the comic characters of Muni and the American (likely candidates for the roles of the “two goats” in the title), he laughs at them gently and kindly, not critically.
Notes from Powerpoint:

Characters:

- American Tourist: The American is introduced as being sunburned and wearing ‘a khaki-coloured shirt and shorts’, implying that he is a foreigner unused to the climate. His clothes are those the English colonizer would have worn and which are now worn by government officials, hence Muni’s confusion about who the man is. The opening remarks of the American are typical of a tourist trying to ingratiate himself with the ‘locals’, but also demonstrate his ignorance and tactlessness: ‘Do you smoke?’, ‘Have you heard of America?’ (Muni has – it is only the way it is pronounced which he cannot understand), ‘your wonderful country’ (Muni has no idea of his ‘wonderful’ country, having probably never left his tiny village) and ‘You have such wonderful teeth. Are they real? What’s your secret?’.

- After these preliminaries, the American gets down to business: he wants to buy the statue. Although not completely ignorant of the significance of the horse and its connection with Hindu mythology (‘He was familiar with the word “avatar”, its only real interest for him is a material one. By paying money for the statue he shows a disregard for the traditions and beliefs of the other country, viewing an object with religious symbolism merely as a commodity – a truly neo-colonial mindset.

- Muni: Muni is a poor and lonely old man whose livelihood are two goats; he has never held more than a few coins in his hands, and any money he manages to save is spent on giving the goats a ‘fancy diet’. He regards them almost as his children, concerned that they might run after him when he leaves, but also, perhaps, even pleased for them, as ‘this will be their first ride in a motorcar’. Nevertheless, Muni wants to prove that even a poor old man like himself is familiar with the conventions of polite conversation: ‘balancing off the credits and debits of conversational exchanges’. Unfortunately, he has no idea what the American is talking about, but he appreciates the fact that he talks to him: ‘all day I have none to talk to except when somebody stops to ask for a piece of tobacco’. His only dream is to open a small shop, perhaps so that more people will stop to pass the time of day with him and show him a little respect, but for this he needs a capital of 20 rupees. So, when the American comes along and offers him 100 rupees for his goats (although he has no idea how much he is being offered) it seems as though his dreams have come true.

- Several factors point to the fact that Muni is treated as a social outcast: he assures the American that the goats are his, regardless of what people in the village say. Moreover, he is not particularly surprised that a ‘policeman’ would want to question him about a murder, and the money lender has also accused him of stealing his pumpkins.

- In the end Muni defines himself through his stories and knowledge of Hindu mythology which has been handed down by his ancestor. This is really all he can offer his listener, but as the American is oblivious to what he is saying, his stories are worthless.

Themes:

- Although this story is very comical, it shows rather serious themes.
• **Language Barriers:** The two men try to converse with each other in their own native tongues, but are not able to comprehend each other. The only two words that Muni knows in English are "Yes, no", which he repeats to the Red faced Man.

• Through this language barrier, Muni mistakenly believes the man is trying to buy his two goats, although the man really wants to buy the town's horse statue.

• As Muni explains the Horse's significance to the town, the Red faced Man tries to bargain with Muni for the sale of the horse.

• "This is our guardian, it means death to our adversaries." "I assure you that this will have the best home in the USA."

• When handed the 100 Rupee note, Muni has no clue how much money it is - "his own earning at any time was in coppers and nickels".

• **Clash of Two Cultures:** Muni and the European man are very different. Muni has been sent out of his house to buy supplies for dinner, but cannot even afford them. The Red faced Man waves around his money, to buy a statue he does not even need.

• Muni lives in a state of poverty whilst the Red faced Man obviously has a lot to spend.

• **Ignorance:** The Red faced Man assumes that he can just walk into a village and purchase the statue, without any thought to whether or not the statue has any significance to the village or not. This shows the Red faced Man as a materialist, thinking that money can solve all problems. To Muni, the statue of the horse hold significant spiritual value, but to the Red faced Man it is just an item to show off in his house.

• In a sense, Muni is also ignorant as he knows little to nothing about the Red faced Man's culture. Academically, Muni's knowledge is nothing next to the Red faced Man's.

**Symbolism:**

• The main symbol is the horse statue. The statue has been forgotten along with time. It is the same with the village - it is not so forgotten but it is so small compared to the rest of the large cities of the world. Another factor this statue represents is the newer generations that are becoming, perhaps, less religious and more liberal. It is mentioned that “even the youthful vandals of the village left the statue alone”. The younger generations do not seem to care about the spiritual significance of the religious statue.

• To Muni, the statue is a part of his life. Without it he would not have a place to stay while his wife tells him to go out of the house. He also cherishes his memories about the statue. However, the American is more interested in the statue in materialistic terms which shows his lack of respect in the other culture. When he sees the statue he finds to his liking, and wants it in his possession at once. He thinks he can just purchase it from the old man, without considering what the statue means for him or the native people. This way, the American is presented as a typical wealthy western person, who is quite materialistic and thinks that money solves all problems.

• **Quotes:** "time to look at other civilisations" - the American treats other cultures like a zoo exhibition making it seems as though he understands American "I know what
you mean" which is just silly because he doesn't have a clue what is going on.

"We can do anything if we have a basis of understanding" - which is ironic because no one has a clue about anything. eg, the plane ticket the American can easily get any day. He's also only interested in what everything looks and seems like on the outside, ignoring any meaning behind it.

"marvelous combination of yellow and indigo, though faded now" - shows his only interest is in the aesthetics which does not get through, because not only are they speaking different languages, but they are worlds apart to even come close to understanding the other culture and also their attitudes to money and LIFE is like totally on different frequencies.
Patricia Grace (1937-)

Journey

Patricia Grace’s first novel, *Mutuwhenua*, was significant in being the first novel published by a woman Maori writer, and she has become an important figure in Maori writing in English in New Zealand. *Journey* shows her interest in the Maoris’ traditional claims on land.

The rather dislocated narrative, with limited punctuation and no speech markings, creates the effect of creating the old man’s perspective, although the narrative is written in the third person. This old man’s perspective, with its old Maori wisdom, is shown to be out of balance with ‘these young people’, the ‘cars and railways’, the new housing and the growth of the city. His journey into the city makes him feel more and more alienated, and this is accentuated when the narrative is interspersed with the interview dialogue. The official and the old man cannot make each other understand. There is no comprehension on either side of the other’s view of how land should be used, and the story ends with frustration, violence and disillusion. In this story, Grace suggests that traditional Maori governance of land has no place in modern government and planning.

Compare with

*The People Before* by Maurice Shadbolt

*To Da-duh, In Memoriam* by Paule Marshall

“At the basis of "Journey” is the very real issue of land ownership, dramatized here as a confrontation between the old Maori who claims the right to leave his land sub-divided among his heirs according to Maori custom, and the government department that has appropriated his land and the entire locality for development. Between the two parties no communication is possible, a situation underlined by the differences in their language. One argues for people and their need for houses, the other enumerates the engineering problems; one speaks from first-hand experience of the nature of the soil and the vegetables it will produce, the other resorts to maps and plans and the abstractions of "aesthetic aspects."

"Journey" is characteristic of Grace’s stories in that the action is sited in the consciousness of the main character. Virtually all her early work accesses this consciousness by way of first-person narration."

([http://biography.jrank.org/pages/4370/Grace-Patricia-Frances.html](http://biography.jrank.org/pages/4370/Grace-Patricia-Frances.html))

Notes from Powerpoint:

Plot:

- The story begins by introducing the protagonist; a 71 year old man preparing to go on a “journey” to town. A taxi arrives to pick him up and during the ride the man delights in the familiarity of the shops near his house. After light conversation with the driver, he is dropped at the train station where he waits for a train to the city. He reflects on the changes that have occurred in the train station from steam engines to modern locomotives. The man notices a new man in the ticket office and doesn’t take kindly to him, even saying he “feels like giving sourpuss the fingers, yes.”
• Entering the carriage of the train he comments on the warmth and comfort of his surroundings, pleased that he has the entire front half of the train to himself. He makes several comments about how good he feels to be alone without anyone fussing over him. The man says he feels sick when people walk slowly to try and keep up with him. As the train begins to travel towards the city he comments on how the land he is travelling over is not really land because it used to be the ocean. “Now this strip here, it’s not really land at all... They pushed a hill down over it and shot the railway line across to make more room for cars.” He comments quite frankly that he wouldn’t mind if the train crashed as he feels he has “done his dash.”

• The scenery outside his window changes after a stop at a station and he is no longer alone in the front half of the train, however he doesn’t mind much. “Everything new, houses, buildings, roads.” The man sees two children enter the carriage and tells us they are sick little kids in clothes that rustle. He remarks on the extraordinary number of houses in the vicinity and compares it to the olden days when there were only two or three farms in the area. As the train goes through a tunnel, he says “they [the Pakehas] were slicing the hills away with big machines”, obviously disapproving of the actions. He then talks about his contempt for Pakehas and the fact they are always having to chop away at things and can’t have a relationship with nature. “Couldn’t go round, only through. Couldn’t give life, only death.” Then he justifies the Pakeha’s actions by saying that it is necessary to have roads and houses everywhere. He talks about the way the Pakehas always find a way to clean things up and how they don’t think of the significance of an event, just about how to fix the mess left after it. The train goes through a second tunnel and the man gives credit to the pakeha for the beautiful buildings, streets, steel, concrete and asphalt they have created. Taking a look at the two kids he says how one had pop eyes and was very quiet, and reminded him of someone called George. “Today if he had time he would look out for George.”

• Leaving the train, the man is pleased that the railway station is the same as he remembers; the same old platforms, same old stalls, what looked like the same people, and it is “not much cleaner than the soot days.” He says that in the old days people used to crowd around the station and starve together so they didn’t drop dead alone. We hear about his family for the first time, and learn that his father had taken care of the family, food-wise at least. His father had laid down a garden and they grew their own food, swapping and selling any surplus.

• He says that he is early, but he knows he can take his time because he is alone. He contemplates what he could do with his day; go to the pub, or the picture theatre. He comments again on how lucky he is to be alone without anyone interfering with his day.

• The man then tells us the story about a cemetery that was bulldozed to make room for a motorway. “Your leg bone, my arm bone, someone else’s bunch of teeth and fingers, someone else’s head.” He calls the Pakeha “funny people” for a second time, and then continues to tell us that the headstones were all placed somewhere and promised to be put up again tastefully, even if they didn’t correlate to where the actual person was buried. He tells us he would rather walk than take a bus, and that it’s nice and early and there’s nothing wrong with his legs, thank you very much.

• The man decides to sit in the railway station because it’s too early to go home and his right foot is sore. He justifies his sitting by saying he could use the time to look
out for George, as others often see George in the station. He hopes to see George as he knows they will go out for food and tea.

• The focus of the story then goes back to the land when the old man arrives at the government office to talk to someone about his land. The man’s views on houses are again made clear. He agrees that people need to have houses, work, ways of getting from place to place, and comfort. He has an argument with the official when he tries to explain want he wants done with the land: sub-division. But the employee wouldn’t listen and instead tries to make the old man understand about the plans that the government has in place for his land. Eventually the argument ends with the old man kicking his foot into the desk and leaving the store, but without limping as he so clearly states.

• He then catches a taxi back home and has another light conversation with the taxi driver before entering the house where the air is tense with anticipation but soon it is realised that the old man got nowhere with the government official. He then frankly states that they [his relatives] were not to bury him but instead “burn me up” as it is not safe in the ground. The story ends with the old man feeling angry and helpless as he sits on the edge of his bed, his foot hurting, and looking at the palms of his hands.

Characters:

• The main character in the story is a seventy-one year old nameless Maori man. We quickly learn that he is has a very independent nature and considers himself very capable of completing tasks on his own. He takes delight in being by himself as he doesn’t like it when people fuss over him and treat him like an old man. The man makes several references to death and age, which gives us the impression he is very aware of his age and the age of his surroundings. The story appears to be in third person but it is told through the perspective of the main character. He repeats the idea that he is strong and sovereign but as the story progresses we see tiny chinks in his armour; a small complaint about a sore foot, a limp, and a moment where he allows himself to be wrapped in a blanket and placed beside a heater. During his childhood he had a father who grew crops for the family to eat and any extra they had were either sold or swapped during the weekend.

• There are very few characters in the story, and none that serve of great importance. On the train are two snotty-nosed children dressed in plastic clothing. The main character shows his contempt for the children and this shows us a little about his character, but this seems to be their only place in the story.

• The man begins talking to a government official about subdividing his land to share with his family when he dies. The official continually shuts the old man’s comments down, saying that what he wants is not possible, his land is in a development area and there will be “no more subdivision.” The official brings forward the number of permits and requirements that are mandatory when building a house in modern times, surveying, adequate right of ways, adequate kerbing etc. The old man continues to defend his views against the official no matter what he says.

Setting:

The story begins at the old man’s house as he is getting ready to get in a taxi to go to town; although we are not given a description of the house but it is apparent this is where he is. A small portion of the story takes place in the taxi as the man is looking out
his surroundings and taking comfort in the familiarity. The town he lives in appears to be a typical New Zealand town, a place where country, city and beach life can all be experienced in the same day. When the man gets out of the taxi he then takes his seat in the front carriage of a train, and the majority of the story takes place from this carriage. We are told stories from the man’s perspective, stories about his younger days and about the way the land used to be. He comments on how the land is now covered with houses and roads but it used to be only two or three farms which makes it seem like he is in a man-made suburbia. When the man gets off the train he is in the city, and he spends the rest of his time in the government agency talking about his land. The majority of the story is actually focused around the man’s thoughts and opinions of his surroundings rather than a depiction of the surroundings themselves.

Themes:

Patricia Grace, a Maori woman, wrote ‘Journey’ to provoke thought on the Maori’s traditional claims on land and their ideas on the value of land as opposed to the ‘Pakeha’s’ ideas. To create such a strong effect and contrast, she has stereotyped a great deal.

The Maori custom involving land is to split the land between the relatives when the land-owner dies, a plan that the main character has for his land. This is because Maori tend to have a more spiritual bond with the land “That’s their stamping ground and when you’ve got your ties there’s no equal land”. They want to use the land for good, practical use and love and appreciate what it produces “the ground gave you good things” and the old man so clearly states the way that the Pakeha have no emotional bond to the earth when he comments on the development of the land: “Funny people these pakehas, had to chop up everything. Couldn’t talk to a hill or a tree...and make them special and leave them.”

The pakehas think only of development and future progress and although the old man doesn’t agree with the way the pakehas go about developing the land (chopping down nature, bulldozing through graves) he does justify them at times saying “people have to have houses” and holding his breath in awe as he sees the city. But the pakeha think only of development with concern for land and this is greatly emphasized by the conversation that the old man has with the government department employee where the employee cannot see eye to eye with the old man saying that “the whole area has been set aside for development. All in the future of course but we must look ahead, it is necessary to be far-sighted in these concerns.” without any concern for the people that live there now.

“Traditional Maori governance of land has no place in modern government and planning.”

-internet

Another theme is that of change. Change is constantly being mentioned in this short story. Even from the very beginning we learn about how the old man is “not really so old” leaving room for the reader to imagine the aging that is still to come; change. Time is constantly moving and the old man is very aware of this as he often says that he is “not old yet” and not deaf and blind as if he is fixated on the thought and dreading the day he does become as old as he so blatantly refuses to be. Perhaps this is because at the moment he feels so helpless about his land that he does not want to die just yet so that he can protect his land from development.

There is a parallel between the old man and the changing world. The old man feels more and more uncomfortable the further he goes into the city and is surrounded by new things, he
does not belong in this new world the same way that old buildings and roads do not belong in the new world being created.

The old man delights in the same, old things while in the taxi as they are exactly that: the same, old things. They have not changed with the rest of the world, they have not been developed, not just yet, and they provide stability to the old man who feels as if everything around him is changing. He wants to grab onto anything that feels familiar.

“An awareness that the world is large and that new ways must be learned is explicitly stated. But running against this, and through all of Grace's writing, is the stronger and more insistent feeling of displacement and loss, and of an obligation to keep alive what remains of the old inheritance.”

- Internet

At the end the old man is questioned about George, and as if to refuse anymore change he states that “George is no different, he is just the same.”

A third theme is the break in communication between the pakeha and Maori. This is perfectly displayed through the argument between the old man and the official about the rights to the land. Neither of them can make the other understand their opinion and the argument ends in frustration and confusion on the old man's part.

One part of the argument talks about the need for houses and the good uses of the land while the other talks about the engineering problems involved with sub-division. One part talks with first-hand experience while the other flusters around with maps and plans.

Techniques:

Repetition of “same old”

Emphasizing the point that at the moment that the old man is happy, he is surrounded by familiar things. The repetition creates an idea of abundance. It is as if the old man is checking them all off in his head, making sure there has been no major change to any of the things that keep him grounded while so far away the world is changing and the change grows nearer.

Little use of punctuation and no use of speech marks

It creates the old man’s perspective despite it being in third person. The way the text flows freely mimics the flow of consciousness of the old man and his wandering thoughts as he gazes around him.

“'Journey' is characteristic of Grace's stories in that the action is sited in the consciousness of the main character.” - internet

Oxymoron

“silent discussion” – catches the reader’s attention, contradictory terms.

Use of Maori words

“pakeha kehuas”
“Tamatea a Ngana, Tamatea Aio, Tamatea Whakapua”

“whanaungas”

“kai”

Gives an authentic feel to the story, the character is more believable.

Quotes:

“But he liked the word Journey even though you didn’t quite say it. It wasn’t a word for saying only for saving up in your head, and that way you could enjoy it.”

“Steam engines went out years ago.”
- He is talking about himself but it parallels with the changing world in which he is outdated.

“Feels like giving sourpuss the fingers, yes.”
- The personality of the old man comes through as tough

“Funny people making land and putting pictures and stories about it in the papers as though it’s something spectacular...Yet other times they go on as though land is just a nothing.”
- The only land the Pakeha's celebrate is developed land. The old man cannot understand why the pakehas cannot feel satisfied with natural land – must always be developing. “land is just a nothing” could refer to his own situation where the government feels his land is not worth saving and instead they will turn into a parking lot.

“But people have to have houses”
Justifying the Pakeha's need for development but also arguing his case that his family need houses.

“Couldn’t go round, only through. Couldn’t give life, only death.”

“That’s what you get when you dig up the ground, bones.”

“Your leg bone, my arm bone, someone else’s bunch of teeth and fingers, someone else’s head, funny people.”

“We want only what we’ve got already, it’s what we’ve been trying to say.”

“We want nothing more than what is ours already.”

“Going, not limping, and not going to die either.”

“He was an old man and his foot was giving him hell, and he was shouting at them while they sat hurting. Burn me up I tell you, it’s not safe in the ground...no one’s going to mess about with me when I’m gone.”
Paule Marshall (1929-)

To Da-Duh, In Memoriam

The narrator in this story remembers her visit from New York to her mother’s home country, which to her is the ‘alien sight and sounds of Barbados’. The story hinges on the relationship formed between the young girl and her grandmother, Da-duh of the title. While the Caribbean is unfamiliar to the young girl, who sees it as ‘some dangerous place’, Da-duh wants to show off its qualities, and a competition is established between the girl and the grandmother, between youth and age, between modernity and tradition and between New York and Barbados, which culminates in the girl’s assertion of the height of the Empire State Building, which dwarfs all that Da-duh shows her. The young girl’s triumph, however, is tempered at the end of the story by ‘the shadow’ of Da-duh’s death.

Compare with

Journey by Patricia Grace

Paule Marshall’s “To Da-duh, in Memoriam,” first published in 1967 and reissued in Reena, and Other Stories in 1983, is a story imbued with thematic resonance. The story focuses on a rivalry between grandmother and granddaughter; this conflict is based on several opposing forces, particularly the rural world versus the urban world, tradition versus modernity, and age versus youth. Marshall skillfully draws these disparate elements together, thus illustrating the cycles of time and the enduring nature of family. These multifaceted themes, along with Marshall’s subtle evocation of Barbadian history and her rich symbolism and metaphor, have made “To Da-duh, in Memoriam” one of the author’s most interesting and discussed works of short fiction.

The story also introduces Da-duh, who appears in different forms throughout Marshall’s work. Marshall openly notes the autobiographical nature of the piece, which she wrote many years after a childhood visit to her grandmother in Barbados. Understanding Da-duh’s influence on Marshall is an important tool for achieving critical understanding of the author’s body of work and her continuing themes. As Marshall describes her grandmother in an introduction to the story published in her 1983, “She’s an ancestor figure, symbolic for me of the long line of black women and men... who made my being possible, and whose spirit I believe continues to animate my life and work.”

Author Biography

Marshall was born on April 9, 1929, in Brooklyn, New York, the child of Barbadian immigrants who were among the first wave of Caribbean islanders to relocate to the United States. Her early life was suffused with Caribbean culture; she spoke its language and followed many of its traditions. Marshall made her first visit to the Caribbean when she was nine years old, which inspired her to write poetry.

After graduating from high school in 1949, she attended Brooklyn College (now part of the City University of New York). She graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in English literature in 1953 and became a Phi Beta Kappa member.

From 1953 to 1956, Marshall worked as a researcher and journalist for the African-American magazine Our World. Her job required her to travel to Brazil and the Caribbean. While attending graduate school at Hunter College, which she entered in 1955, she started writing her first novel, the autobiographical Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), in her spare evening hours. She completed it on a visit to Barbados.
This novel introduced many of the themes that Marshall would further develop throughout her literary career, particularly the importance of her relationship to her family in the Caribbean. She dedicated the novel to her grandmother, who inspired her to write “To Da-duh, in Memoriam.”

In 1960, Marshall won a Guggenheim Fellowship, which she used to complete the book of novellas *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961). In this work, Marshall expands her Barbadian community to include other members of the African diaspora. In the years until her next publication, the novel *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), Marshall worked for a Caribbean magazine, *New World*, and as a librarian for the New York Public Library.

She followed up the novel the following year with *Reena and Other Stories*, which included the previously published “To Da-duh, in Memoriam.” Marshall also became involved in the civil rights movement during the 1960s, joining the American Youth for Democracy and Artists for Freedom; the latter groups included other important African-American writers such as James Baldwin.

Throughout the 1970s, after marrying her second husband, a Haitian, Marshall divided her time between New York and the West Indies. She also taught creative writing and literature at several colleges and universities. Although she did not publish any fiction in the 1970s, her work began to draw greater critical attention and was even being taught in college classes.

She published the novel *Praisesong for the Widow* in 1983. It shares with *Brown Girl, Brownstones* the theme of the search for identity. The novel *Daughters* was published in 1991. In the 1990s, Marshall also became sought after as a keynote speaker and lecturer. She also won a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 1992. Toward the end of the decade, she retired from a teaching position at Virginia Commonwealth University, a position that she had held for ten years, to devote herself full-time to writing.

**Plot Summary**

“To Da-duh, in Memoriam” is an autobiographical story told from the point of view of an adult looking back on a childhood memory. The story opens as the nine-year-old narrator, along with her mother and sister, disembarks from a boat that has brought them to Bridgetown, Barbados. It is 1937, and the family has come to visit from their home in Brooklyn, leaving behind the father, who believed it was a waste of money to take the trip. The narrator’s mother first left Barbados fifteen years ago, and the narrator has never met her grandmother, Da-duh.

Although an old woman, the narrator’s grandmother is lively and sharp. When she meets her grandchildren, Da-duh examines them. She calls the narrator’s older sister “lucky,” but she silently looks at the narrator, calling the child “fierce.” She takes the narrator by the hand and leads the family outside where the rest of the relatives are waiting. The family gets in the truck and takes them through Bridgetown and back to Da-duh’s home in St. Thomas.

The next day, Da-duh takes the narrator out to show her the land covered with fruit orchards and sugar cane. Da-duh asks the narrator if there is anything as nice in Brooklyn, and the narrator says no. Da-duh says that she has heard that there are no trees in New York, but then asks the narrator to describe snow. The narrator takes advantage of this opportunity to impress Da-duh with all the things that New York does have, and she describes the snow as falling higher than Da-duh’s house and cold enough to freeze a person. Then the narrator decides to show her grandmother popular dances from America and sing popular songs. When the performance ends, Da-duh stares at the narrator as if she came from another planet, but then smiles and gives her a penny to buy candy.
For the remainder of the visit, the narrator spends most of her time with her grandmother. They walk among the sugar cane, and the narrator tells Da-duh all about New York, describing the world of the city with its buildings, machines, and modern appliances. The narrator can sense her grandmother’s fear at hearing about all of these signs of urbanity. The narrator even tells Da-duh that in New York she beats up white girls, a remark which leaves Da-duh speechless.

Toward the end of the visit, Da-duh takes her granddaughter to see a very tall palm tree. She asks the child if they have anything as tall in New York. The narrator almost wishes that she could say no, but she tells her about the Empire State building, the tallest building in the world and over one hundred stories high. Da-duh gets angry and accuses her granddaughter of lying. The narrator says that she will send a postcard of the Empire State building when she gets home. Da-duh realizes that she has been defeated. They return to the house, Da-duh looking uncertain and the narrator feeling triumphant but sad.

The next morning, Da-duh doesn’t feel well. The narrator sings for her until breakfast. Then the two take their customary walk, but it is short and dispirited. At home again, Da-duh spends the rest of the afternoon napping. This pattern continues until the family returns to Brooklyn. On the day of their departure, Da-duh reminds her granddaughter to send the postcard.

However, by the time the narrator mails the postcard, Da-duh has died. Shortly after the family left, riots in Bridgetown took place. To quell the protest, the British sent planes to fly over the island and scare the people. Everyone in the village fled into the cane fields for safety, with the exception of Da-duh; she stayed in the house and watched the planes swoop down. The narrator imagines that, to her grandmother, it must have seemed that the planes were going to come right at her, in her house. When the planes withdraw and the villagers return, they find Da-duh dead in her chair by the window.

The narrator recalls how she always remembered her Da-duh. As an adult, she does penance for how she treated her grandmother, living in a downtown loft in New York and painting pictures of the sugar cane while the machines downstairs thunder noisily.

**Characters**

**Da-Duh:** Da-duh is the narrator’s eighty-year-old grandmother. She has lived her whole life on Barbados and is confident and proud of her lifestyle, surroundings, and ways of looking at the world. She dislikes the trappings of the modern world, such as any form of machinery, and is uncomfortable in the city of Bridgetown. When Da-duh first meets the narrator, the narrator imagines that she saw “something in me which for some reason she found disturbing.” However, Da-duh also feels connected to her granddaughter, as evidenced when she clasps her hand.

Da-duh is completely at home in the countryside of St. Thomas where she lives. She takes her granddaughter on daily walks on the land surrounding her house. She shows off the glories of the natural world, and listens with an air of fear to her granddaughter’s descriptions of life in New York. She is not accustomed to having her life challenged, as her granddaughter does, and she attempts to assert authority through the royal palm tree, which is the tallest thing she has ever seen. When her granddaughter tells her about the Empire State building, Da-duh is finally defeated.

The small instances of surrender that the narrator had seen throughout the visit now pervades Da-duh’s person. Instead of eagerly going on walks, she spends mornings staring out the window and spends her afternoons napping; grandmother and granddaughter take
only brief, dispirited walks. She dies shortly after her family leaves, and her death suggests both her stubbornness and her defeat. When Britain sends planes to fly low over the island in retaliations for riots and strikes, Da-duh, alone among her community, refuses to take cover in the cane fields. She stays in the house and watches the planes. The narrator imagines that it must have seemed to Da-duh that the planes were going to destroy her house and the whole island. When the rest of the village returns to their homes after the planes have departed, Da-duh is dead, still sitting in her chair at the window.

Narrator: The narrator is nine years old when she visits Barbados and meets her grandmother, Da-duh, for the first time. The narrator is a strong-willed, unique child. Her stubbornness matches Da-duh’s, and both of them immediately recognize this similarity. Sensing this, the two lock gazes upon first meeting, and the narrator revels in her triumph when her grandmother looks away first.

Their likeness draws them together. On the day after their arrival, the pattern of their relationship emerges when Da-duh takes her granddaughter on a walk through the countryside. Da-duh shows off her world, and when prodded by her grandmother, the narrator agrees that they have no natural, healthy environments like this in Brooklyn. Da-duh’s comments make the girl realize what her world is missing. At the same time, however, the natural world, discomfits the girl. She sees the sugar canes as “giant weeds” and thinks they have taken over the island. The narrator brings into her grandmother’s world songs, dances, ideas, and descriptions of the city, which her grandmother listens to, with a sense of disbelief. Throughout the course of the visit, grandmother and granddaughter battle over whose world is more grand.

Toward the end of the trip, however, the narrator wins the battle with finality when she tells Da-duh about the Empire State building, which would tower over the royal palm tree, the tallest thing that Da-duh has ever seen. However, the narrator is able to take little delight in her victory. For the rest of the trip, she tries to perk her grandmother up by performing songs.

After leaving the island, the narrator never sees her grandmother again because Da-duh dies soon thereafter. The memory of Da-duh, and the way she belittled her, remains with the narrator for the rest of her life. She also learns a valuable lesson from her grandmother: that in its unique way, the rural, natural world is as important as the urban, technological world and has something of value to offer her.

Themes
Rivalry

The story pits an aging Barbadian grandmother against her youthful American granddaughter. Upon their first meeting, the two sense a similarity in each other that far outweighs the differences presented by the seventy years between them. Most importantly, each has a stubborn strength of will and a confidence that her way of regarding the world is the right way.

The characters knowingly participate in this rivalry. Da-duh has the knowledge that comes with age and experience, but the narrator has the brash confidence of youth. Da-duh has her pride of place, showing off her land with its lush plants, trees, and cane fields. The narrator has the technological superiority of the modern world, which she uses to goad her
grandmother into silent submission; Da-duh is not impressed by technology, but it is so foreign to her that she cannot even conceive of her granddaughter’s descriptions of life in New York. The story ends with the narrator’s victory in this rivalry, which makes her feel somewhat sad because she knows that her success only comes as a result of her grandmother’s concession.

**Time**

As the oldest and youngest characters presented in the story, Da-duh and the narrator represent the span of time and its cyclical nature. Marshall writes in the last paragraph, “She died and I lived”; in a sense, the role that Da-duh occupied in the family has passed on to the narrator. She dies to make way for her granddaughter and the world, period, and change that she symbolises.

The grandmother and granddaughter also represent how the passing of time changes the world, forcing its older members to be left behind. The granddaughter’s triumph at the end of her visit illustrates that in many ways the world truly belongs to the new generation. This theme is further reinforced by Da-duh’s death soon thereafter. There is no place for Da-duh in the modern world, therefore she must leave.

**Rural and Urban Worlds**

Because of their stubbornness, grandmother and granddaughter participate in a rivalry in which each tries to prove that her world is superior. Da-duh has the wonder and beauty of the natural world on her side, but her granddaughter has all the technological wonders of the urban world. Da-duh is frightened of the trappings of the modern world; in the truck, driving through Bridgetown, she clutches the narrator’s hand tightly. Once back in the country, among the sugar cane fields, she feels safe and comfortable again. The granddaughter, a child of one of the most vibrant cities in the world, is unimpressed by these sights, however. To her, the sugar canes — which have sustained the Barbadian economy for hundreds of years — are only giant weeds.

Da-duh and the narrator spend most of their days together walking around the land. Da-duh points out all the amazing sites of the island — the fruit-bearing trees and plants, the tropical woods, the tall royal palm. Each of these objects that are so precious to Da-duh come from the natural, rural world and represent the agricultural tradition of Barbados. In response to Da-duh, the narrator shows off the dances she learns from the movies and the songs that play on the radio. She brags about all the machines and technology New York offers — kitchen appliances, trolleys and subways, electricity — technology of the urban, modern world. She finally wins the rivalry by telling Da-duh about the Empire State building, which was the tallest building in the world at that time and hailed as a great wonder of architecture.

**Slavery and Colonisation**

Barbados was a British colony for hundreds of years. Historically, the lands of Barbados belonged to the privileged white minority, while enslaved Africans worked the land that made them wealthy. Emancipation came to Barbados in 1838, but the whites still held the power. Conditions for Africans on the island essentially remained the same.

Many elements in “To Da-duh, in Memoriam” reflect this heritage. As Martin Japtok writes in *African American Review*, in this story “Marshall shows the inescapability of history by inscribing it into the very landscape.” The plants that Da-duh so proudly shows off to her granddaughter, whose names Da-duh intones “as they were those of her gods,” are not indigenous to the island, instead originating from other British colonies. Indeed, sugar cane, which brings Da-duh so much happiness, was the fundamental cause of long-lasting African
exploitation. The planes that bring about Da-duh’s death also represent colonial oppression; Britain ordered these flyovers in response to a 1937 strike and riot.

Style: Point of View

“To Da-duh, in Memoriam” is written from the first-person point of view. The majority of the story is viewed through the child narrator’s eyes. She recalls when she first met Da-duh, her first impression of the sugar cane fields, and the rivalry that exists between the two family members. Hers is the only voice the reader hears, and hers are the only eyes through which the reader sees Barbados and Da-duh. Thus the rivalry — and both participants’ reaction to it — is only explained as a nine-year-old child might have seen, or an adult looking back at the nine-year-old child that she was. At the end of the story, the narrator pulls back even further from the events that form the bulk of the story. Her narration of what happens after she and her family leave Barbados — the riots, the planes flying over the island, and her grandmother’s death — are told from the point of view of an adult looking back at something that has happened a great distance and time away. The point of view is also less personal, more factual. The story’s final paragraph, though still firmly within the narrator’s point of view, shows the narrator’s close ties to the past and the story she has related. She reveals the lasting guilt she has felt about showing up her grandmother and making her feel inferior. She also reveals the ties she feels to her past and to her ancestry, of which Da-duh remains the most potent symbol.
Rhinton Mistry

Of White Hairs and Cricket

This story’s concern with age and mortality is reflected in the structure, beginning with the removal of the narrator’s father’s white hairs and moving to what seems to be his friend’s father’s terminal illness. In the space of the story the narrator has his own recognition of mortality and emerges from boyhood into the adult world. He moves from considering distasteful his task of removing his father’s white hairs to a full awareness of the process of ageing which he ‘is powerless to stop’. There are other signs of this process throughout the story: the loss of the childhood cricket matches, the increasing frailty of Mamaiji, the father’s vain hope of a new job. It is the encounter with the friend Viraf, Dr Sidhwa and the glimpse of Viraf’s father which gives the narrator his epiphanic moment.

Compare with

A Horse and Two Goats by RK Narayan
To Da-duh, In Memoriam by Paule Marshall
The Enemy by VS Naipaul
Games at Twilight by Anita Desai

Notes from Powerpoint:

Overview:

- This story’s concern with age and mortality is reflected in the structure, beginning with the removal of the narrator’s father’s white hairs and moving to what seems to be his friend’s father’s terminal illness.

Characters:

- Narrator (Kersi):
- Daddy: aging everyday, grey hair, bad job
- Percy: studying away from home
- Mama
- Mamaji: religious, blurred eyesight, “Doctors said it was due to a weak spine that could not erect against the now inordinate weight of her stomach.” Mixed relationship with her son-in-law

Setting

- ‘Of White Hairs And Cricket,’ is set in village in rural India, mentioned through references such as the Times of India which the Kersi’s father reads (where the job advertisement is placed). Vocabulary refers to terms used within India, such as kustis (which are belts worn by Parsees, woven from 72 threads).

“Is powerless to stop”

- As the story progresses, the persona realizes that the world around him is slowly ageing. The tone of the story is a sinister one at the thought of being human just like
everyone else and that eventually life will cease one day. The narrator of the story, however wishes he could stop time where it is now. He fears that one day his loved ones will age and leave him. This is connoted through the young boy, Kersi, who repulsively pulls out his father’s white hair every Sunday. The more he does this, the more conscious he is of the ‘aging; that is happening. Sadly, it is something which he “is powerless to stop”

- There are other signs of this process throughout the story: the loss of the childhood cricket matches, the increasing frailty of Mamaiji, the father’s vain hope of a new job.

“Somehow we’ll get the money to send you. I’ll find a way”

- In the midst of the time when we were children, everything seems to amaze us, they all seem interesting and is appreciated more than normal. Kersi, when he was being told this by his father as a child, he used to ‘hug’ him (showing his appreciation). However, when we get older, those simple advices that we get from our parents are just ignored. They are our life-long friends and guardian. The short story demonstrates kersi’s realization of that fact when his best friend’s father passes away.

- Kersi describes his friend’s obese, dying father as having “lines on his brow, like Daddy’s were less deep.” Not long before he neglected his white-hair picking obligation for one Sunday and it is apparent that he would have a feeling of guilt. Furthermore, it connotes the idea that ageing comes with independence in the sense that our own opinions come first before other people’s feelings; something we never notice until we have expressed them and the end result could have been avoided.

“Tired, shoulders drooping and with a gait lacking confidence.”

- Everyday in life, people grow and develop (both physically and mentally) in maturity. Kersi, towards the end of the short story realizes his father’s state is not how he was when he was a young boy. It is only then where he actually starts to realize that people do grow up, get tired and old. That only gives him the willingness to be a better son to his father.

- Even though, it is easy for people to show their friends their love and affection for them. To their parents, it is seen as a whole different (and much harder story). That of which, Kersi is just beginning to learn.

Imagery:

- The image of spinning things is regularly shown in this ‘Of White Hairs and Cricket’: from Mamaiji’s (Kersi’s grandmother’s) dexterous needlework or a record on the turntable, to the achievements of Jasu Patel, the famous Indian spin bowler (Cricket in the story symbolises time and loss). The fate of Viraf’s father provides a kind of epiphany about mortality for Kersi, who ends by lamenting his inability to communicate directly his love and gratitude to his father for all he has given him.

- The quote ‘uproot the signposts of mortality’ (indicating the plucking of Kersi’s father’s white hair), are linked to other images showing decay, and time passing. One of these is the baby on the outdated Murphy Radio Calendar, which partially hides a spreading path of crumbling plaster on the Boyce’s walls. The baby on the
calendar would have been the same age as Kersi, but he continues to present an ‘innocent and joyous’ smile to the world, indicating that he is defying the passage of time.

Contrast:

- "Mamaiji’s painful weakness of the spine through which she is unable to stand fully erect, and which leads Kersi to contrast the ‘big handsome woman’ she once was to the frail figure in front of him; the tough, always,” but the signs of his father’s failing now depress him. The contrast here once again shows that there will come a time when the things we were able to do once will one day cease. Once again, the theme of mortality is evident.

Themes:

- Mortality, coming of age:

  Kersi realised that his father is aging (after seeing his friend’s ill father in bed). He recognises his father’s own mortality and vows to continue pulling his father’s white hair (with the hair representing aging). This realisation reveals the maturing attitude of Kersi.

Other Language techniques:

- Mortality is continually shown, and Kersi realizes the mortality of his father when he visits his best friend Viraf, and observes his dying father with his “stone-grey face” (this metaphor insinuates his struggle with his illness) and “lines on his brow, like Daddy’s, only Daddy’s were less deep (this simile conveys the fact that one day his father will also die—mortality is inevitable).
Ahdaf Soueif (1950-)

*Sandpiper*

The narrator in this story is unwilling to disturb even ‘one grain of sand’, and this reflects her passivity as her relationship with her husband breaks down under cultural pressures. The relationship with him is carefully charted, almost historically, but it is significant that he is never named, and a sense of loss grows at the centre of the narrative. The narrative structure includes disconcerting juxtapositions between memory and the present to show the narrator’s state of mind. The narrative describes a love between the two formed elsewhere; it is the return to the husband’s country which creates the cultural and family pressures on the relationship, including the loss of female independence, work and identity, which cause the couple to drift apart.

Such concerns of conflicting cultural pressures are perhaps a natural concern of an author born and educated in Egypt, before continuing education in England. She now divides her time between Cairo and London.

**Compare with:**

*To Da-duh, In Memoriam* by Paule Marshall

*The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

*Five-Twenty* by Patrick White

**Notes from Powerpoint:**

In the short story ‘Sandpiper’ there isn’t really an obvious plot. At the beginning, it is written in the past tense. This story is written first person and is mostly the narrator’s flow of thoughts. The narrator, an English woman, describes how she used make her way down to the white beach. She describes how she used sit and lie in the sand, just where the water could reach her, “I used to sit where the water rolled in, rolled in, its frilled edge nibbling at the sand…” The narrator then muses about her husband and child “…twelve years ago, I met him. Eight years ago, I married him. Six years ago, I gave birth to his child.” She then thinks back to the first summer she had come with her husband, an Egyptian, to this beach-house west of Alexandria. She tells of how her ‘occupation’ was to love her husband. She lists all the times that she would love him.

She then goes on to think about her second summer, it is apparent here to the reader that this is where the story, that so far seemed like a love story, changes. “My second summer here was the sixth of our love - and the last of our happiness.” She recalls the times past when they used to live a flat in England. The narrator describes her pregnancy, and how she loved the baby inside of her. She reflects that should have left with her child when she had the chance. The tense then changes to the present tense. In between describing her room, the narrator tells of memories she has in the house. How she tried to help out around the house, but the housekeeper, Um Sabir, would tell her off. How her daughter, Lucy, would crawl into her bed at night. She thinks back to a woman and son she saw in the airport once. “All her worldly treasure was on the couch with her...” The narrator then describes her trip to Africa, and how she made notes of lots of things on her trip so she could write story to give to her husband. She never did write the story, but still has the notes in a leather portfolio.
She says how she must stay inside during the hottest midafternoon hours. Her daughter, Lucy, is outside with her father, uncle, two aunts, and five cousins. The narrator misses her daughter and longs for her to come back inside. “I look, and watch, and wait for Lucy.” She describes the marketplace in Kaduna, with vultures on the roofs. She again reflects that she should have taken her daughter away, but cannot now. She describes how her and her husband drifted apart, how their different languages and cultures become too much. “I watched him vanish - well, not vanish, slip away, recede … He asked me to hold him, but he couldn’t tell me how.” “My foreignness, which had been so charming, began to irritate him.” Lucy returns to the house, wet and sandy. It is now time for Lucy to spend time with her mother. She showers and asks the narrator to plait her hair. The narrator thinks back to a time when she was sure that she would die. Her plane out of Nigeria was fine until the landing gear wouldn’t work and they had to crash land in Luxor. She expresses the last thoughts she had in those moments. She finishes Lucy’s hair and describes her as “Lucy. My treasure, my trap.” The story ends with a paragraph that relates back to the beginning. It is a description of the beach and the desert. It is a metaphor for the relationship between her and her husband. “But what do the waves know of the massed, hot, still sands of the desert just twenty, no, ten feet beyond the scalloped edge? And what does the water know of the depths, the cold, the currents just there, there - do you see it? - where the water turns a deeper blue.

Main character: (Narrator)

- Her name is unknown
- English woman, predominantly lives in England with her husband and daughter
- Paler than her husband and daughter, easily burnt in the Alexandrian weather
- Travels to Alexandria every summer with her husband to stay with his family
- Uncomfortable in the foreign land, unable to fit in with the culture
- Feels trapped by her family, especially her daughter, whom she loves but traps her in this foreign land

Husband:

- His name is unknown,
- Egyptian man, dark skinned, black hair
- Loves his wife but feels constricted by her inability to fit into his culture, and her obvious unhappiness in his country

Grows distant from his wife as cultural differences separates them

Daughter (Lucy):

- Happy, playful child who seems to fit in fine in Alexandria
- Described by her mother as “my Lucy, my treasure, my trap”
● Resembles her father more than her mother

**Husband’s old nanny (Um Sabir)**

- Kind old lady who takes care of household chores around the house (cooking, cleaning, etc)
- Scolds the main character when she tries to help around the house, saying “shame, shame. What am I here for? Keep your hands nice and soft. Go and rest.”
- Through her typical Egyptian customs are portrayed such as covering mirrors when a baby is born, taking over chores

Other members of the husband’s family include the nephew, father, sister

Sandpiper is set in Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, where the main character spends her summers with her Egyptian husband and his family.

Alexandria is a seaside resort with typical white Mediterranean style buildings and many beaches. The word ‘white’ is used constantly throughout the story to set the scene – “A path of beaten white stone, bordered by a white wall...white sands...white spaces”. The word grows to have negative connotations, restricting and foreboding – “All I can see is dry, solid white. The white glare, the white wall, and the white path, narrowing in the distance”.

The climate at Alexandria is described as hot and dry – “The heat of the sun saturates the house; it seeps out from every pore...fierce sun...glaring sun...”, and the main character occasionally contrasts the arid climate of Alexandria to the colder, wetter climate of her native country, England. Because of her lighter skin and incompatibility with the Alexandrian environment, she needs to be protected from “the sun, the mosquitoes, the salads, the drinking water” - a job which gradually begins to annoy her husband, who also starts to find her foreignness less charming and more irritating.

The many beaches at Alexandria play a major role in the story, being where the main character had created many memories, she also focuses on the way the waves move on the beach and how it feels to be sitting at the water’s edge in great detail. The beach is often described as being on “the edge of Africa....the edge of this continent where I live” to give us a sense of the space and size from a grand scale. The beach is where the main character happily spent many summers with her husband and his family, but as she gradually starts to feel the restrictions of this foreign land and her foreign family, she visits the beach less and less, leaving her happy memories behind on the sands. In the last paragraph she describes how the sand and the sea meeting on the beach never experience each others' depths - “But what do the waves know of the massed, hot, still sands of the desert....and what does the beach know of the depths, the cold, the currents just there..” – a metaphor for cultural interactions, where neither party truly understands the other’s culture (Eg. Her and her husband’s relationship)

Alexandria slowly becomes a trap for the main character who cannot fit in to her husband’s culture, and feels alienated in the foreign land.

**Difference in Cultures:**

the difference in culture causes the division in the narrator’s marriage. Her struggle to adapt to her husband’s culture causes her isolation during the summers (she stays inside in her room while the family is outside). The rest of the family notice that she is a foreigner and
doesn’t fit into their culture. “That is what we pretend I do, sleep away the hottest of the midday hours.”

the isolation makes her feel inadequate as a wife and mother “My foreignness, which has been so charming, began to irritate him...He was back home, and he needed someone he can be at home with, at home”

Soueif shows that no matter what culture you come from, you can always feel insecure and uncomfortable when you experience a new culture or land. “what do the waves know of the massed, hot, still sands of the desert just twenty, no, ten feet beyond the scalloped edge? And what does the beach know of the depths, the cold, the currents...where the water turns a deeper blue.”

**Trapped by love:**

by the time that her child is 6, the narrator no longer feels connected to her husband or her own family. She expresses that her one lifeline to the outside world during her summers is her daughter Lucy. “My Lucy, Lucia, Lambah...Lucy. My treasure. My trap.”

her love for Lucy becomes the only reason she commits to her broken marriage. The narrator merely waits for her daughter to grow up and surrenders herself to her isolation and loneliness. “I wait for my daughter to grow away from me”

The narrator uses imagery in the first paragraph of the story to describe how she sees the ocean. She does this again in the last paragraph, showing the readers the contrast between her feelings during her married life and her feelings before her marriage. Both she and her husband aren’t named, perhaps to enable the readers to be able to relate more to the personas. The relationship with her husband is charted carefully and chronologically, showing the gradual breakdown of their marriage under cultural pressures. The narrative structure includes disconcerting juxtapositions between memory and the present to show the narrator’s state of mind. The narrative describes a love between the two formed elsewhere; it is the return to the husband’s country which creates the cultural and family pressures on the relationship, including the loss of female independence, work and identity, which cause the couple to drift apart.
Adam Thorpe (1956-)

**Tyres**

The narrative of *Tyres* is set against the tension of German-occupied France during the Second World War, where relationships are strained, little can be openly communicated and suspicion is rife. The brutality of war suddenly intervenes in the middle of the story with the killing of the suspected members of the French Resistance movement (the Maquis) and the villagers forced to view the bodies, their ‘guts...literally looped and dripping almost to the floor’, before the hanging of the ringleader from the village bridge. Set against this is the gradually developing love affair between the young lad learning to maintain vehicles in his father’s garage and the girl who cycles past each day. The young man’s narration leads the reader gradually to his final act of involvement with the resistance against the Germans and its effects; ill-luck seems to be the cause of guilt, and the final revelation of the age of the narrator shows how long that guilt and fidelity has lasted.

In this story, Thorpe sets ordinariness – working on cars, changing tyres, a developing relationship – against extraordinariness – the Second World War and German occupation – to create a small poignant story of war.

**Compare with**

*To Da-duh, In Memoriam* By Paule Marshall

*The Moving Finger* by Edith Wharton

*The Taste of Watermelon* by Borden Deal

**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

“Adam Thorpe has an unusually cosmopolitan background, being brought up in India and Cameroon, and now living for more than a decade in southern France. A sense of place and locality is essential to his writing, and greatly enriches its preoccupation with the intangible qualities of ‘Englishness’. It usually depicts the lives of ordinary individuals being inexorably shaped by larger historical and topographical forces; the national experience of war and social change, the development over centuries of the English landscape. (He is clearly an admirer of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, and his novels have some affinities with those of John Fowles, who has himself praised Thorpe’s). As a writer, Thorpe is something of an all-rounder: his best-selling book *Ulverton* in 1992 has been followed by three more substantial novels to date; a book of short stories, three highly-praised poetry volumes, as well as continually perceptive critical reviews for national newspapers and periodicals. One of Thorpe’s great virtues is his ability to imaginatively re-enter the past. This is seen most brilliantly at work in *Ulverton*, whose twelve connected stories extend through time, to tell, in a variety of voices, the unrecorded ‘history’ of this fictional yet archetypal English village. (*Ulverton* recurs as a setting elsewhere in his work). The first story is post-Civil War, around 1650, and the final one, dated 1988, takes the form of a film script. What strikes one about these stories is their feel of authenticity, the pressure of real lived experience, which draws out the reader’s empathy and identification. Among the most outstanding are the series of letters within ‘Leeward 1743’, and the peasant’s stream of consciousness in ‘Stitches 1887’. The book’s achievement is to seamlessly bring together social history, imagination, and a poetic insight into the emotional complexity of life in the rural past, and the diverse ways in
which lives over the centuries have been determined by the community and its surrounding land. Thorpe’s following two novels are by no means as engrossing: Still (1995) in particular is a demanding and difficult book to get through. As even the enthusing John Fowles admitted, its sprawling attempt over nearly 600 pages to bring film and fiction together results in ‘an endlessly jacuzzi of slang, film crew jargon and erudition’. Pieces of Light (1998) is also uneven but has some very atmospheric episodes, especially its opening portrayal of colonial life in Cameroon during the early 1920s. A small boy’s wonderment at the forest’s inhabitants, the river’s ‘evil mists’, the folklore of his African companions, are all superbly evoked. These memories both sustain and haunt him when he is taken back to England, staying at the chilly house of his Uncle, an author and mystic, in the village of – yes – Ulverton. At school, he is told that his mother has ‘disappeared’ into the forest, and this childhood trauma, along with his African experiences, is re-visited when he returns to the village as an old man many years later. The narrative then lurches into a metaphysical murder story, depending for its impulse upon the well-worn device of ‘found letters’, and the gradual revelation of their contents, which force him to reconsider his own identity as well as his mother’s fate. Far more convincingly down-to-earth is Shifts (2000), an outstanding volume of often highly poignant stories, linked this time not by setting but by their common theme of work, its power to determine as well as to destroy lives. This thematic unity gives scope to a variety of world voices telling us their tales, such as a tyre mechanic during the early 1940s who sabotages a German officer’s car, with fatal but highly ambiguous consequences; and a hard-headed saleswoman at odds with her family’s feelings. An African immigrant in London during the 1966 World Cup takes over the life of a disappeared friend, and finds, in the casual racism that he encounters, ‘identity is just a voucher, a scrap of paper’. Particularly memorable is a ghost story with peculiar sexual overtones told by a veteran bin-man to a credulous journalist; and ‘Iron’, in which a handmade iron bench crushes a young German woman’s leg but later saves her son’s life after a motorcycle accident. The only story that topples from Thorpe’s usually scrupulous sympathy to sentimentality is ‘Sawmill’, in which a hard-bitten timber manager in Africa during the 1950s saves a baby gorilla from being sacrificed to appease native gods. Thorpe enjoys a solid if unspectacular status as a poet, built up with his first two poetry collections, Mornings in the Baltic (1988) and Meeting Montaigne (1990), and consolidated by his most recent, From the Neanderthal (1999). The latter certainly plays with his most characteristic theme, of everyday lives shaped by larger forces, the upheavals of history played off against the slow evolution of the landscape. Poetry being an inherently personal art form, Thorpe often writes in this context about his own family life. ‘Sketch’ elegises a great-grandmother who ‘outwitted history’ by escaping massacres in Germany and Poland, to expire under a tree in England. ‘Lichen’ develops a metaphor for memory in the moss on a mountainside climbed over the years by himself, his father, and his grandmother. One of the most striking poems, ‘Fossil’, describes a visit to the ruins of the Nuremberg arena in Germany, finding a fossil ‘whorled into the stone / like a birthmark’. While all traces of the Nazi rallies have gone, the fossil remains. The title poem is a lengthy narrative (recalling William Golding’s novel The Inheritors), giving voice to prehistoric man: the struggle for survival, procreation, and an elegiac appreciation of the seasons’ passing: ‘So frail, this summer, / I would like to plait it / like grass, and keep my place / In the book of my life / forever…’. There is a note of rural nostalgia in Thorpe’s poems, and sentiment where children are concerned, but he has an attractive ability as a poet to ‘go beyond the recognisable into the mystical’ (Peter
Porter). *Nineteen Twenty-One* (2001), is characteristically divided between rural village England and the Continent, and a definite return to novelistic form. The context is that great social wound, the First World War and its aftermath, focussing upon the blighting of a generation’s lives as well as the yearnings of artists. Its central character Joseph Munrow is a would-be writer still struggling in 1921 with his own marginal if horrific war experience; and the Chiltern village where he goes to write gradually reveals to him its dark store of wartime trauma. Its men and women are crippled as much by repressive attitudes as by wounds, madness and bereavement. A tour of the Flanders battlefields becomes the catalyst for both writing the novel and for maturing into manhood. This is effected by love interest with the two contrasting women that he meets on the tour: naïve, highly religious Tilly, and an older German widow who subsequently follows Joseph back to England. As a grand subject, the Great War has of course been well explored in other current novels, most notably by Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker, but Thorpe’s easily bears the comparison: some scenes (notably a joyously naked outdoor drenching) bring D. H. Lawrence to mind.”

Dr Jules Smith, 2002

Notes from presentation:

Plot:

“Andre Paulhan et Fils” is the family business, that, the main protagonist describes in great detail. Told in the first person narrative, Raoul, reminisces about his enthusiasm for the trade of tyres from “as soon as I [he] could stand upright.” A very important lesson is taught to him by his father about how “one must never fall short of the highest standards, in this job” as it is their responsibility to not “be sending a man to his death.”

Then, in 1942, Raoul is 17 years old and the Germans are occupying France after the defeat in the War.

The story then progresses into his life under the control of Germany. False impressions of his Father pretending to be friendly with the Gestapo when he secretly despises them are upheld to guarantee his son’s future in an uncertain and violent Nazi occupied France. The extent of this violence is shown in later events.

Raoul falls in love with Cecile Viala. She regularly bikes past his shop on the way to work. With the Nazi’s in power France is hit hard by a depression any job is a job worth having so he watches her bike in the morning to work and home in the evening and very soon a romance between the two blossoms. But he notices her looking worn just like the roads that are “battered stupid” by the Nazi trucks so are the people. This period in France was “a difficult period” where “everyone ‘cut corners’.”

Cecile turns out to be part of the Resistance and Raoul is in business with the Milice (French Militia), naturally he starts to doubt Cecile’s intentions towards him and wonders if she is trying to involve him in the Resistance.

As the war drags on Raoul’s dealings with the Milice become more frequent tension increased in France and an anonymous man threatens him about being collaborators with the Germans. His romance with the Cecile progresses and he is soon head over heels in love with her. His father who used to joke about this no longer does. They hold hands for the first time and shared their first kiss.
When Germans suddenly open fire into a forest Raoul risks his life to go warn Cecile to take the other route to work as the Germans are blocking her usual route and they will open fire on anything that moves,

The Gestapo warn the villagers about the consequences of anyone that is found to be a part of the resistance. Three men are shot and Petit Ours (the leader) is hung over the bridge. The three men have their guts wrench open on the table and the whole village is made to file past – these are the consequences of being part of the resistance. Petit Ours body hangs, swaying in the wind, off the bridge the village children walk past to get to school but no one dares to bring the body down.

The Gestapo officer who ordered the execution of Petit Ours comes to the tyre shop to get one of his tyres replaced and Raoul sabotages the tyre. As he is about to leave Cecile rides past and stops when she sees the Gestapo she tell Raoul he should be ashamed of himself and Raoul tells her its not what she thinks. But the Gestapo officer has taken a liking to Cecile. She eventually rides away but the bike chain Raoul just fixed broke further down the road and the Gestapo officer picks her up in the car with the sabotaged tyre and Raoul is too late to save her. The car crashes and they all die.

For him this is now “the beginning of winter” in his life and he remains unmarried mourning the loss of his love wishing he’d listened to the lesson his father had tried to teach him a long time ago.

The main protagonist in ‘Tyres’ is the young Raoul Paulhan. His father André started the family business André Paulhan et Fils (or simply André Paulhan and Sons) the year Raoul was born (1925). Together they share a passion for maintaining the condition of vehicles, bicycles and cars alike. Raoul and his father are “very proud” of their business. The story itself is narrated by Raoul, and through this, we as the readers experience his emotions first hand.

A few minor characters are introduced by Raoul throughout his recollection of this somewhat tragic tale. Jules is an old friend of Andrés as well as his “card-playing companion.” Jules works in an office, and is in charge of regularising (imposing rules/principles) for the gendarmerie. In fact, Jules happens to be regularising the STO (compulsory work service) or Service du Travail Obligatoire. During World War Two, at which the time this story is set, hundreds of thousands of French workers were enlisted and deported by the Germans to work as forced labourers in the Germans war effort. Raoul talks about how he managed to escape the fate of “certain others” his age, therefore, he remained in France working with his father. André despises the Germans as they seemed to ‘use’ the people of France whenever it suited them, and possibly because they were responsible for his limp he had had since 1917 (during World War One).

André is described to be a “man who could never take risks.” As a mechanic of sorts, he wants to do his job to the highest standard as any carelessness would indeed be hazardous (for example, Mme Renouvin who “slid off the road in her little blue Peugeot). He says to his son that he will still be “getting in [his] hair” at ninety, meaning that even after he is long retired, he will continue to help run the family business. He tries to cover his fear for the future through the use of humour. He also makes cheeky remarks such as “Chatting up skirts then?” in an effort to embarrass his young son. He is however, very proud of his son.
Cecilé Viala is Raoul's love interest. He has watched her grow from a young girl into a woman, and admires her from afar. She is described as being clever and beautiful, with glossy, black hair and olive skin. “She spoke in a very sweet, soft voice, and had a winning smile.” Often, the shy teenagers exchange a nod or a smile as she rides past on her bicycle from time to time. Raoul finds it hard to speak to her when she politely says bonjour, as he is “shy with people, unless they are clients.” He is also embarrassed by his newly broken voice. In the three years they had already known each other, they had barely “exchanged more than a greeting” but clearly, Raoul is infatuated with her. Through clownish behaviour, Raoul tries to win her heart. Their relationship blossoms through the course of the story. She makes him “very happy.”