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**SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT 1 - Women's Writing - SHS1205**

## **SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER**

**- VIRGINIA WOOLF**

### **ABOUT THE WRITER:**

Virginia Woolf, the English author, feminist, essayist, publisher and critic, was one of the founders of modernist movement. Adeline Virginia Stephen was born on 25th January 1882 in London, as the daughter of Leslie Stephen, a man of letters and Julia Jackson Duckworth, a member of Duckworth publishing family. Her youth was a traumatic one shadowed by a series of emotional shocks, with the early deaths of her mother and brother, a history of sexual abuse and the beginnings of a depressive mental illness that plagued her intermittently throughout her life. Following the death of her father in 1904, Woolf, along with her sister and two brothers moved to the house in Bloomsbury where they befriended Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey and Maynard Keynes. This was the nucleus of Bloomsbury group. Later in 1912 she married Leonard Woolf, the political theorist, writer and critic. Woolf's books were published by Hogarth Press, which she founded with her husband. During the Nazi invasion, Woolf and Leonard made provisions to kill themselves. After the final attack of mental illness, Woolf loaded her pockets full of stones and drowned herself in the river Ouse on March 28, 1941. On her note to her husband she wrote "I have a feeling I shall go mad. I cannot go on longer in these terrible times. I hear voices and cannot concentrate on my work. I have fought against it but cannot fight any longer. I owe all my happiness to you but cannot go on and spoil your life."

The Voyage Out (1915) was Woolf's first book. Her other works include Jacob's Room (1922), Mrs. Dalloway (1925) To the Light House (1927), The Waves (1931) Orlando: A Biography (1928), A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938)

## **A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN: AN OVERVIEW**

A Room of One's Own was first published on 24th October 1929 by the Hogarth Press in England. In October 1928, Virginia Woolf delivered a lecture on "Women and Fiction" at Newnham (the college established especially for women), and Girton (the first British college which accepted women students) colleges under Cambridge University. These talks on the topic Women and Fiction were later revised and devised into a full length book titled A Room of One's Own.

*A Room of One's Own* is considered the first major work in feminist criticism. Woolf analyses women's struggle as artists, their position in literary history and their need for independence citing Bronte sisters and Jane Austen as examples. By incorporating real and fictional people into the essay, Woolf tries to find answer to the historical and contemporary questions regarding women's art and social position. Woolf says that it is the gender consciousness of both women and men that cripple their creative genius. Men derogate women to safeguard their dominance in the society whereas women become angry and insecure about their inferior status. According to Woolf, a real genius should possess an androgynous (borrowing Coleridge's term) mind so that their writings will reflect both male and female feelings. The mantra which runs throughout the essay is that a woman must possess 500 pounds and a room of her own if she is to write creatively.

## SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

The part titled '*Shakespeare's sister*' comprises the third chapter of the whole work. The narrator alludes to history to dig the facts so as to find out the relationship between women and literature. It deals with the differences between women represented in fiction and women in history. It also tells us about the condition of Shakespeare's sister. If such a sister lived in that same era, what would her fate be?

Woolf begins the chapter by analyzing the condition of woman in the Elizabethan era. Elizabethan era which is hailed as the golden era of English literature had many male poets, sonneteers, playwrights and prose writers. But the same era did not witness even one female writer, at least for namesake. So Woolf thought of analyzing the history of women who lived in that era. She took out Professor Trevelyan's History of England to find out the position of women in the history of Elizabethan England. Woolf was astounded to know what reality was. Wife beating was the recognized right of man and it was practiced by the poor as well as the wealthy. The daughter who refused to marry the person of the parent's choice could be locked up and beaten by the parents. Marriage was not the outcome of love between two persons; instead, daughters were married off to uphold the family's honor. Child marriages were not news at all. Women were puppets in the hands of men. But women in fiction were the other way round.

The characters like Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Desdemona and many others had a personality and character of their own. Imaginatively, she is given higher position, she pervades poetry from cover to cover but practically she has no value at all. Woolf writes, "She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of anybody whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read,

could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.” This is the confused view that we get after reading women in history and women in fiction. Woolf tells us to think imaginatively and poetically at the same time. “that she is Mrs. Martin, aged thirty-six, dressed in blue, wearing a black hat and brown shoes; but not losing sight of fiction either- that she is a vessel in which all sorts of spirits and forces are coursing and flashing perpetually.”

She goes through Professor Trevelyan’s history to find out what history meant to him. History for him consists of many movements and wars where men are involved. Occasionally a woman is mentioned, an Elizabeth or a Mary and there ends the history of women. These women belonged to high class family. No middle class women who were very intelligent and good were mentioned in these history books. This woman, who has only brains and character, has not kept any record of her existence, no plays or poems, no anecdotes or diary entries. No history of such a woman existed. Woolf also suggests the students of Newnham and Girton colleges to supply such a history where women had a role. They should collect a mass of information like; at what age did she marry, how many children she had, had she a room to herself, did she do the cooking or did she have a servant and so on. All these account of an average Elizabethan woman would be scattered somewhere. The students should find it and bring it to the limelight and supplement the existing male dominated history with women’s history. Nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. Woolf enquires into the state of women in the Elizabethan era. Why did not any woman produce a poem? What did she do from morning to night? Where they educated? Did they have sitting rooms for themselves? These women had no money and they were married off at an early age itself. It would have been quite odd to know that Shakespeare’s plays were written by a woman. Woolf quotes a bishop who had once declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present or future to have the genius of Shakespeare.

Woolf then moves on to an imaginative world where she creates a sister to Shakespeare. What would have happened if Shakespeare had a sister named Judith who was wonderfully gifted and as talented as Shakespeare? Shakespeare went to grammar school and probably learnt Latin grammar and logic. He was a wild boy who poached rabbits shot a deer and in the very early age itself married a woman who bore him a child, too early than is usual. He fled the place to seek fortune in London. He had a taste for theatre and very soon became a successful actor, practiced his art, met everyone, became the focus of everyone. Woolf then analyses what would have happened to his extraordinary sister. She too had the same mentality as her brother had. But she was not sent to school, had no chance to learn anything. She went to her brother's library and occasionally read a book or two. But the parents wouldn't allow her to read. They, instead, told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew in the kitchen. The parents were not able to encourage their daughter's talents because they were very much aware of the circumstances in which women were supposed to live. The girl perhaps scribbled a line or two but hid it from everyone. Then she found out that she was to be betrothed to the son of a wool-stapler. She cried out, but no one paid heed to her voice. She was severely beaten and her father began to blackmail her emotionally. She was hurt; she couldn't disobey her father so she packed all her belongings and left her native place to London to fulfill her dream. She was not even seventeen years old. She too had a tune for words, a taste for theatre as her brother had. She stood at the stage door. She wanted to act. Men laughed at her. According to the theatre manager, no woman could become an actress. He said that women acting were like poodles dancing. At last the theater manager, Nick Greene took pity on her and she found herself with a child in her womb. This is the result when a woman's body gets tangled with a poet's heart. She killed herself and her body was buried in some unknown place because no monuments were built for this wonderfully talented woman.

Woolf agrees with the bishop that no woman will have the genius of Shakespeare because genius was not found among the servile, downtrodden and the working class. How could then a girl who was forced into homely duties and responsibilities at a tender age have genius? Though not as Shakespeare, genius of some sort would have existed among the working classes and the women. Women did not get the opportunity to get them expressed. If one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even a very remarkable man who had a mother, then we are on the track of a lost novelist, or a suppressed poet. Woolf also says that the writing we now label anonymous, the ballads and the folksongs might have been written by a woman.

Woolf wanted to say that a woman of Shakespeare's genius living in the Elizabethan age would certainly have gone mad and killed herself. Because, instead of acknowledging her genius in writing, men focus on her body and molest her. And chastity was very important in women's life and to cut free from it, needed rarest courage. Even though she had written some lines it might have gone unsigned and unmentioned. It is because of the sense of chastity in women writers that we have a roll of women writers writing under male pseudonym. Women writers like Currer Bell, George Eliot and George Sand were all victims of inner strife and they veiled themselves under male pseudonyms, thus paying homage to a male dominated tradition. They had to veil themselves in order to express their inner conflict. Pericles is of the opinion that the chief glory of a woman is not to be talked of. Anonymity runs all along women's blood.

If a man wants to express his mind through writing, it is a quite difficult job. Material circumstances will be against it. Making money to live becomes a problem. People will be indifferent towards it. People are least bothered about whether the writer gets the apt word or not. But for a woman these difficulties are much more severe. She will not possess a room of her own, she will not have enough money to live as she is completely dependent on her father or brother, and she cannot go round the world, from one shelter to another shelter. All these are

material difficulties. There lies an immaterial and the hardest difficulty to face. When people are indifferent to men, they are hostile toward women. Woolf says, "The world did not say to her as it said to them; write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, write? What's the good of your writing?" They have the same opinion as Mr. Oscar Browning had about women that the best woman was intellectually inferior to the worst man.

The enormous body of masculine opinion is that women are incapable of any intellectual activities. Though no one told this explicitly, it was implicit on everyone's faces which lowered her vitality and affected her work in a negative way. Women novelists have overcome these kinds of protests and have become successful in producing women novelists of merit. The woman composer and woman painter stands where the actress stood in the time of Shakespeare. "A woman composing is like a dog walking on his hind legs". History repeats itself.

Through this description Woolf wanted to tell us that even in the nineteenth century woman was not encouraged to be an artist. There is something called masculine complex which makes men forbid their women from reaching heights; be it in arts, politics or any walk of life.

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## **In Search of our Mothers Garden**

**- Alice Walker**

In the opening of "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", Walker quotes from Jean Toomer's *Cane*, taking note that in early literature by black men, black women were seen as hopeless and characterized as mere sex objects. "I asked her to hope, and build up an inner life against the coming of that day...I sang, with a strange quiver in my voice, a promise song." [14] The focus of this essay is on that of the Black women throughout history who have created masterpieces from the scraps they were afforded. Black women's potential for creative freedom is stifled by their position in society that places a series of tropes and caricatures onto their being, operating to delegitimize the work they produce. Walker says black women did not have the opportunity to pursue their dreams because they were given the main responsibility of raising children, obeying their husbands, and maintaining the household: "Or was she required to bake biscuits for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint watercolors of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasturelands? Or was her body broken and forced to bear children." [15] Walker personalizes these women by referring to them as "our mothers and grandmothers". [16]

Toomer felt that black women were unhappy and felt unloved. Both Walker and Toomer felt that black women were not allowed to dream, yet alone pursue them. "They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality, which is the basis of art, that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane". [15] Walker proceeds in saying how oppression has caused many talented black women to go unnoticed or unheard of. Walker cites Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, and Aretha Franklin to note talent lost among the black race and culture.

Additionally, Walker refers to Virginia Woolf's, *A Room of One's Own* and writer Phillis Wheatley; Walker compares both artists conveying that all of Woolf's fears were Wheatley's reality; due to restraints all of Woolf's goals were unachievable for Wheatley. Woolf writes, "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty." Wheatley experienced everything Woolf dreaded, although Wheatley was granted limited freedom of expression and education by her owners. Walker focuses on the phrase, "contrary instincts"[17] used by Woolf, believing that this was what Wheatley felt since she was taught that her origin was an untamed and inadequate culture and race. In Wheatley's poetry she describes a "goddess", [18] which Walker perceives as her owner, whom Wheatley appreciates although she was enslaved by this person. Walker pays tribute to Wheatley when she writes, "But at last Phillis, we understand. No more snickering when your stiff, struggling, ambivalent lines are forced on us. We know now that you were not an idiot or a traitor". [19]

According to Walker, society viewed Black women as, "the mule of the world", [19] this caused black women to become emotionless and hopeless. Further, in the essay Walker gives a personal account of her own mother, "And yet, it is to my mother-and all our mothers who were not famous-that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day" [20] Walker describes her mother's simple, but appreciated talent of gardening. For Walker, her mother's ability to continue gardening despite her poor living conditions portrays her mother's strong persona and ability to strive even in hardship. "She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making

quilts enough to cover all our beds. There was a never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own private thoughts; never a time free from interruption-by work or the noisy inquiries of children. The theme and idea of legacy reoccurs towards the end of the essay. Walker describes, the legacy of her mother, "Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life".[20] Walker reveals how she has found and understood herself, while researching her heritage.

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# AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGER

-ADRIENNE RICH

## ABOUT THE POET

Adrienne Rich was born on May 16, 1929, in Baltimore, Maryland, United States. She was one of America's foremost public intellectuals. A poet, essayist and a radical feminist she has been called "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century. She attended Radcliffe College, graduating in 1951 and was selected by W.H Auden for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for *A Change of World* that same year. In 1953 she married Alfred H Conrad, Harvard University economist and in 1955 came out her second volume of poetry *The Diamond Cutters*.

Rich was one of the most eloquent and provocative voices in America and spoke on various themes like the politics of sexuality, race, language, power and women's culture. Her collections include *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law* (1963) and *Leaflets* (1969). She has also authored several nonfiction prose including *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (1979), *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993), *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986) and *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (2001).

Rich's poem Aunt Jennifer's Tiger reflects the gender struggle prevailing in the male dominated society. It is a feminist poem which explores the alternative world created by Aunt Jennifer through sewing. It has become a Hobson's choice for her to create an imaginary world of freedom and self expression which the patriarchal society denies her. The poem deals with the weight of marriage, the unhappy and submissive station of a woman in life and the stagnation of married life. Sewing becomes a metaphor of escape into another world, the world of art.

## **ABOUT THE POEM**

The poem Aunt Jennifer's Tiger describes the confinement that every woman faces in her married life. The speaker is a small child who tells about the aunt and her married life which turned out to be the biggest disappointment in her life. The fearless tigers prancing on the screen are contrasted with the real life of the aunt where she carries the massive weight of her wedding band. Aunt Jennifer, by creating the tigers in needlepoint, tries to escape from the fret and fever of real life to an imaginative world where she too can be free and happy as the tigers are.

On the literal level the aunt is sewing tigers on a cloth. The tigers are being described as the "bright topaz denizens of a world of green". The tigers are least afraid of men beneath the tree and they prance with self assurance and self confidence. This life of the tigers among the woods, the energy and the pride they possess, the chivalric manner in which they move is contrasted with the life of the aunt. The tigers pace about as if they are the kings of the domain. She is sewing as fast as her fingers allow her to because of the feeling that she will not live to complete her creation or that she will be interrupted by somebody.

The last stanza deals with the transient nature of human life and transcendental nature of art. Aunt Jennifer's ordeals will remain with her till her death but the tigers that she has created will remain proud and unafraid for ever. Aunt Jennifer's life was not in vain, she has created something that will live on after her death and burial. Despite the woes of her life, she has created something which will immortalize her.

The poem can be interpreted in many ways. It can be about a woman who tries to immortalize herself through art. She will live forever through the tigers she has created. The poem can also be counted as self-actualization where she tries to lead an independent life without being afraid of anyone. The readers get a glimpse of aunt's sub conscious mind where she makes an escape to a jungle ruled by beasts. The beasts in these woods are not afraid of

their predators as the aunt is. The uncle is depicted as the predator that has hunted and captured the aunt and kept her in a cage from which her only escape is through sewing.

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## **I am not that Woman**

**- Kishwar Naheed**

**Kishwar Naheed** is a Urdu feminist poet. She was born and brought up in India and moved to Pakistan during the Partition. She saw the sufferings of women during the Partition with her own eyes, which left a deep impression on her and inspired her to become a feminist. She has won several awards for her poems

### **Introduction:**

*"I am not that woman"* is a feminist poem, written by Kishwar Naheed. As a Indo - Pakistani woman , she has described the plight of women in third world countries in a poignant way. But the poem is not just idle brooding over the fate of women; it is a strong declaration by a woman who has had enough and is now prepared to stand and break free of everything that shackles her. The poem is a ray of hope and confidence to women, with an empowering undertone that women are capable of rising above all the shackles, if they have the willpower; while mockingly pointing fingers at the duplicity and double dealings of a misogynistic society.

*I am not that Woman* is a poem directed towards the empowerment of women. Through examining the treatment many eastern cultures uphold towards the female race, Naheed boldly concludes that women are being oppressed and deserve to be respected, you can view the full poem here. *I am not that Woman* contrasts both the explicit and discreet ways in which women are oppressed in society. Through a partially feminist lens, Naheed makes the point that women

deserve respect and they are not commodities. In a large part of the east, women are oppressed explicitly by being locked behind doors and being told that they can not become anything in life. Of course this can not be generalized to every country and city, but many eastern cultures do carry this mentality even today. This explicit oppression may be absent in the west but Naheed states that women are being discreetly oppressed in western cultures, by having their worth tied to their bodies. The beauty of women is more often than naught used in advertisements to sell a variety of products, Naheed makes a very valid point that this too is a form of oppression. Linking a woman's value and self worth to her body is a form of oppression in and of itself. I am not that Woman is an empowering poem reminding the world that women deserve respect, and more importantly, women should appreciate and confidently respect themselves.

The first stanza addresses the oppression women face in both the western culture and eastern culture. Naheed takes on the voice of a female persona, which can easily be seen as her own voice, especially due to the fact that her roots are from the eastern part of the world. She blatantly refuses to be seen as that woman who sells socks and shoes. This is referring to a model or actress who allows herself to be photographed dressed in lucrative clothing in order to promote a commercial product. In today's society displaying your body, especially for women, has become a means of earning awe and praise from everyone around us. Nearly every girl in the west, if not the world, is bent on perfecting her outward appearance so that she can show it off when she goes out. Naheed targets this point and tries to bring to light that forcing a woman to believe that her self worth is immediately linked to her body is a strong form of oppression that we are failing to address in society. She moves on to discuss the equally, if not more disgusting oppression that occurs in the east. Men lock the women indoors and forbid them from leaving the house. In the more extreme regions of the east, even a woman walking outside alone is considered immodest and disgraceful. If the main purpose of men keeping their



women indoors was to protect them from the dangers of the street this would be understandable to some degree, but Naheed is making it clear that the main purpose that women are locked indoors is because women are considered inferior and a burden. Women are entirely objectified and at extremes are not even seen as humans anymore, merely modes of receiving pleasure and satisfaction. Naheed addresses the hypocritical nature in which men are free to go wherever they please without any care or question while women are literally locked behind stone in an attempt to silence their mind.

Naheed takes an empowering approach and likens womankind to light in the darkness. She states that no matter how much the men force her to remain inside, no matter how they try to replace her flowers of hope and aspiration with thorns and chains of contempt and oppression they will not succeed in silencing her mind, because she is not that woman that can be fooled into believing that she is only worth her beauty, that her body defines her status as someone who is somehow inferior to men. In the second stanza Naheed uses a metaphor, referring to herself or rather all womankind as light. Naheed uses symbolism here as well, referring to her character as the flowers that were in her lap, and the restrictions and harsh words addressed to her as embers and chains.

The third and fourth stanza seem like they are referring to a woman who was literally sold into slavery but a closer examination of the eastern culture can allow us to conclude that Naheed is referring to forced marriages. In the eastern culture daughters and women are considered to be a burden because they do not have many job opportunities and are therefore entirely reliant on their caregivers for most, if not all of their lives. More importantly when a girl is 'married off' by her parents, her parents are expected to give the groom a very large dowry, many times this accounts to thousands of dollars worth of furniture and clothes. It is for this reason that women are considered a burden in the eastern culture. Naheed is almost vehemently stating that they trade off women, telling them it is not chaste to stay unmarried

for too long, and happily wash their hands from the burden of financially supporting them any further. She states that this female persona may have been forced to drown by being given off in marriage like a burden, but she still refuses to except their definition of her. She can walk on water while she is drowning is beautiful imagery to describe that she refuses to give up even in a seemingly impossible situation. She refuses to drown in their doubts and claims about her capabilities. Naheed concludes the fourth stanza with stating that the captive minds of the individuals who degrade women can never be free. They may be trying to chain her mind down but it is infact their own minds that are chained.

In the final stanza,the female persona elaborates that she refuses to be that half naked woman selling products on a poster. She is stating that she refuses to disrespect herself and her body, refuses to objectify her body for others to see and receive pleasure. She states that now she will allow her character to blossom free by respecting herself as a mother and as a loyal chaste human being.

*I am not that Woman* is a liberating poem which strongly urges women from all cultures to respect themselves and not allow themselves to be oppressed in any form. Naheed exposes the disturbing mentality of many eastern cultures that women are simply burdens and objects. Naheed instills the ideology that women are mothers, they are a light in the darkness and that they are so much more then the bodies that they are in. Naheed reminds us to focus on what is inside of us and even in our superifical society, remind ourselves to respect our bodies and who we are as people.

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## **Poetry**

### **-Marianne Moore**

The poetry of Marianne Moore is the outcome of the artists' exploration into the aesthetics of Poetry in art. Marianne Moore in her poem Poetry brings her aesthetic experience and substance in the art of poetry. The poem itself designates how the art of poetry is a genuine art. This genuineness of nature in poetry is something which draws many artist to create a heightened sensitivity of its aesthetics. Aesthetics here not only is presupposed to be in creation, it also refers to the consumption and its vital experience to stir the stimulus in the senses of the receptor. For the poetry is an art per se, which has the precision of language and vagueness of imagination and experiences. It is possible for oneself to diminish into the art of poetry and its aesthetics. This knowing of an art of poetry from within the art is significantly important and is well portrayed from the intellect of the artist in her poem Poetry.

The forfeiture of the art of poetry has been questioned by the intellectuals of different generation. While every artist have their own response reposed to their own aesthetic belief seeing poetry as a form of art. Marianne Moore in quest of her aesthetic substance in the poetry proposes an art of poetry to hold a 'genuineness'. Moore finds the art of poetry as a fiddle in life. As she expresses in the poem Poetry, "there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle" (13). Moore considers the art of poetry as a fiddle in life. The fiddle which is important to escape from the harsh reality of life. The nature and beauty of poetry carries the artist away from the real world. Thus this being away from the real world can be considered as a fiddle to life, in which there is the beauty of aesthetics. The aesthetics of poetry remains to be an irrevocable art; for the artists who search for aesthetics in art.

Generally, Poetry as an art functions to deceive life to delve into the world of art created by the poetry in itself. This being of losing one's own self into an artistic world and beauty of an art is the aesthetics an art carries in it. Which is a fiddle for Moore in real life. There is also

a difference between the real world and the artistic world. The ones who understand both the world know how the artistic world creates a blur into the real world as if they are the two different aspects of life. The artistic world makes the artist escape into the world of art by deceiving the artist to create an illusion in contrast to the real world, an artist lives in. Though the highest persuasion of human is to sense the aesthetics of an art, in real life there are persuasions ordinary such as food, clothes and shelters.

In the art of poetry Moore from her realm of posteriori and priori brings forth an idea as Immanuel Kant notes in his book *Critique of Judgement* in a chapter dealing On the Ideal of beauty, the receptors taste as such, "There can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful. For any judgment from this source [i.e., taste] is aesthetic, i.e., the basis determining it is the subject's feeling and not the concept of an object" (79). The idea of Moore on the ideal beauty of poetry in itself is her own individual feeling, not a universal element of an art. For the aesthetics of developing this own ideas of taste in beauty of art Immanuel Kant highlights, "the archetype of taste, is a mere idea. an idea which everyone must generate within himself and by which he must judge any object of taste" (79). As the idea in itself is from an outcome of the artists taste into the realm of an art. For Moore the aesthetics of Poetry is in its genuineness. As a genuine art can help one to taste the aesthetic beauty of the art itself.

Moreover, Moore relates aesthetics a poem holds has the aesthetic element as, "hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that can raise" (13). For the experience of aesthetic lies in the reception. As Immanuel Kant notes in *Critique of Pure Reason*, "The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility..." (172). Therefore, the aesthetics of poetry for Marianne Moore gives a sensation affect to the cognition. For Moore

the sensation of the art of poetry can create such aesthetics, which comes from the sensation of art of poetry in itself.

However, Moore resonates the poetry as an art, which can create a sensuous experience in humans. This intense heightened sensation to remark in perception have deeper meaning of aesthetic beauty; comprehending in the art of poetry. As G. W. F. Hegel's *Aesthetic: Lectures on Fine Arts* highlights, "art which sets truth before our minds in the mode of sensuous configuration, a sensuous configuration which in this its appearance has itself a loftier, deeper sense and meaning" (101). Thus, Moore's substantial idea in the aesthetics of a poetry is to create a sensual affect to its reader. Like an art creating a sensation which in itself is an aesthetic appeal. Aesthetics cannot be seen, it can only be felt like an air cannot be seen but felt. So is aesthetic which can only be felt through the sensuous upheaval it creates in our senses.

Poetry as an art for Moore has an aesthetic equivalence. This equivalence comes for Moore in Poetry being a "Literalists of imagination" (13). As Theodor W. Adorno in a chapter on *Paralipomena* in his book *Aesthetic Theory* notes, "Every artwork if it is to be fully experienced, requires thought and therefore stands in need of philosophy, which is nothing but the thought that refuses all restrictions" (356). Here Moore's use of imagination and Adorno's use of refusion of restriction by artist contemplates to denote the same aesthetics a work of art with imagination provides. To have an aesthetic appeal in a work of art such as poetry, imagination is a magnum ingredient, with its genuineness.

Moreover, Dewitt H. Parker in a chapter *Aesthetics of Poetry* in his book *Principles of Aesthetics* writes, "For the best poems achieve a synthesis of the elements of words,--they are at once musical and imaginative and thoughtful. Yet with difficulty" (76). The imagination is what creates an aesthetic experience to the receptor. In a sense they provide a getaway from the ordinary life. This getaway is a gateway to the aesthetics of an art, found as an art for the

sake of art. For Moore it is the imagination which provides a potentiality in poetry. Due to its ability to turn an art into an astonishing spectrum through the blend of imagination; for imagination makes real unreal. Nevertheless, For Moore the twentieth century idea of aesthetics is relevant. Aesthetics for Moore has in its autonomy. The poetry is an autonomous form of an art which has the sensation and imagination. Thus, for Moore it is not necessary to be in every poet, although it would be a good idea to give these sensation and imagination in an art.

However, for Moore a genuine poetry can only stir the stimulus of the receptor. Few provide the imagination into work. The search for Moore's ingredient in a piece of poetry is an artistic quest for creating art for the sake of art itself. The art with imagination has the world of its own. While the work resembling to the real world as a mimetic consists an art to be from the real life with the same toads human who march hither and thither. Therefore, an aesthetic world of an art for the sake of art has the substance of genuineness, carrying an imagination which can heighten the sensitivity of the receptor, which for Moore is the aesthetics.

To understand a work of art, if historical contexts are to be understood then the art cannot be an art in itself. Due to the content being reliant on other substance. An autonomous work of an art defies history. For history brags the art to its context, an aesthetic work frees itself from the history to create a world of its own per se. This autonomous entity of an artwork without any reliance to history to create an artwork comes from the genuineness of the art. An art to be genuine should be autonomous. The autonomous work of an art provides an aesthetics which cannot be bragged into a certain time frame. The works which endure the artistic imagination into play have the autonomous entity to be an art of aesthetics. As we all know in the end the motif behind a work of an art is to provide an aesthetic pleasure to its receptor. The aesthetic experience of the work cannot be different from the art itself. For art vitalizes the senses of the receptor to feel the aesthetics, art works as an object to stimulate senses, through

its sound, images, taste and triggering of emotional and intellectual sentiments to create an aesthetic experience.

A genuine art can provide the access of such vital feelings into foreplay, for it brings the sensitivity of aesthetics. For Moore Poetry with the interplay of imagination can create such sensuous experience. As Theodor W. Adorno in his book *Aesthetic theory* notes, "There is no aesthetic refraction without something being refracted; no imagination without imagined" (5). Thus, the art which can create imagination also can stir an impulse of imagination to create a genuineness reposed in its vital form of poetry. In art the mode of perception is important aspect. If there be no consumer then hardly can an art be privileged for the means it develops. The art should provide an aesthetic, from the creativity to delve ones spirit into the substance through its form and content. The power of which can put back together the pensive soul in itself. Aesthetics here is not only presupposed to be in creation, it also refers to the consumption and its vital experience to stir the stimulus of the senses of the receptor.

For a piece of art acquires the spirit to lust ones soul into the self for it fabricates as a fetishism in the abyss of space and time. For the spirit in an art can liberate a sense of nouveau magnum opus. Aesthetics is the taste of highest order for which every artist should work for. Marianne Moore knows it and objectifies the taste of her senses through the precision of language in her poetry. For poetry carries the aesthetics which can create sensual experiences or intellectual illumination providing the aesthetics from its beauty for it is the natural creation of a mind. Therefore, Moore's poetry is a delvement into the aesthetics a poetry carries. The aesthetics a poetry carries has a genuine imagination, a world per se with sensual experiences of opus to stir stimuli.

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## **‘SPELLING’**

**- Margaret Atwood**

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It is important to recognise that Atwood's poetry is not just about feminism, it's also an exploration into the depths of human consciousness and loneliness. Above all her poetry may intend to conclude how a woman's biological structure can be used against her.

The poem 'Spelling' is a philosophical observation of the way women are treated academically. The main focus which is clearly highlighted within the poem, is education and not just education, but education for women. 'Spelling' consists of 9 stanzas, which are of a different length, this may also metaphorically suggest that all women aren't the same although the male gender is. Stereotypically very much like Hitler, biologically not politically. The poem uses her well known technique, free verse, she uses this to emphasise the meaning of the start and end of a sentence. The structure of the poem moves from a description of a scene to a philosophical reflection on the education of women.

The poetic voice of the poem is an educated mother watching her 'daughter' play on the floor 'with plastic letters'. 'Red, blue & hard yellow,' the primary colours used indicate how young the 'daughter' is, it also becomes apparent how early these girls in this ethnicity begin education. The first line of the poem is very dense, it introduces many aspects of culture and women's lives. The enjambment used within the first stanza shows the unstable ways of not educating women. The reference to 'spell/spelling/how to make spells', these three statements show how the daughter is learning to 'spell', she then learns the correct way of 'spelling' words and 'spells' is a reference to the future. It may have also be a reference to witchcraft or how poetry is the highest form of language, 'spells' has a double meaning, very ambiguous, it may have been a suggestion of witchcraft and the education of the 'daughter.' Biblically Eve made Adam cast a 'spell' due the serpent, a sexual spell, which also shows how



women from very early on lost their immortality due the negative atmosphere the bible creates for women.

Atwood uses 'Spelling' as testament of the power of words and she depicts the victimisation of the powerlessness of women without the use of language. 'I wonder how many women, denied themselves daughters' this has a double meaning, firstly, it may have been intended to be a deliberate act of a man for women not enjoy words, unlike some women, for example, Jane Austen who wrote heavily sexual literature. On the other hand, it may also have been seen as having an abortion, and then hiding behind the physical barrier of a 'curtain' to 'mainline words' for some women words are like drugs in the bloodstream. By creating powerful language these women may get a euphoric 'high' and then become addicted to words. They'd rather nurture words instead of a child.

'A child is not a poem/a poem is not a child', both a poem and a child have to be conceived and matured in the womb of a woman. However, a woman has a choice to birth a poem, where a child they do not have a choice. 'Is not' shows how a woman has to have one or the other. After this effective way of words Atwood returns to describing the scene, 'However' this splits the stanza and stops a line of thought. This allows the political side of the poem to heighten. One of Atwood's well known ways of imagery is vivid verbs, 'thighs tied/together by the enemy/so she could not give birth', this shows how men act upon their own hate on to women. 'Thighs tied', is also an old Jewish belief on how to treat an unfaithful pregnant woman. It denies their purpose. There is also no male equivalent for this abuse, it can only be done to a woman.

'Ancestress: the burning witch,/her mouth covered by leather/to strangle words.' Mary Webster was a resident of Puritan Hadley, Massachusetts, was accused of witchcraft in 1684. Atwood believed Mary was one of her ancestors, she made Webster the subject of her poem

‘Half-Hanged Mary’. Webster was left hanging all night. It is known that when she was cut down she was still alive and lived for another 14 years, ‘her mouth covered by leather/to strangle words’, this shows how there was no last utterance to remember her by, no words that might of evoked pardon for her to change the communities minds. The people surrounding Webster realise ‘A word after a word/after a word is power’, this emphasises the power of words together, not singular. Without literacy the mind has nothing. Words give women more power, the words become damaging for men.

Mary Webster was left to burn at the stake, ‘language falls away/from the hot bone’, this metaphor shows the flesh of the witch burning away along with all the powerful ‘words’. ‘At the/melting point of granite/hollow’, these women are hollow not solid like granite. They are before the volcano, (‘flows out of it like blood’), the people are therefore forced to confront their own mortality. The burnt body shows how when there is no language used we cause destruction. Whether in life or death, the body speaks. Webster has been through a true crucible and emerges to tell a story of women confronting their fragility. Atwood concludes the poem ‘name/naming/name/your first word’, the echo creates an emphasis on how your name is a part of you. However, some women don’t have that right

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## **MY GRANDMOTHER’S HOUSE**

**- Kamala Das**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The poem, My Grandmother’s House, first appeared in Kamala Das’s first anthology of verse titled *Summer Time in Calcutta* (1905). It is also an autobiographical poem in which the poet’s longing for her parental house in Malabar is movingly described. She is reminded of the ancestral house where she had received immense love and affection from her grandmother.

## ABOUT THE POEM

**My Grandmother's House** is a nostalgic poem written by Kamala Das (Kamala Surayya). Though it's a short poem its meaning is vast and wide. The undercurrent of the poem is Kamala Das's childhood life with her grandmother where she felt more love and peace than she enjoys in her present life

The poet's feminine sensibility finds its clearest loveless relationships in it. A note of pessimism runs throughout the action of the poem. It reveals the poet's painful unfulfilled desire to visit her grandmother's house to which she is deeply and emotionally attached. The poet is shocked to learn that the house is all in ruin after the death of her grandmother. She suffers in silence due to the wear and tear it has undergone in her absence. A death-like silence reigns in her grandmother's house.

The poem *My Grandmother's House* has only 16 lines, very short poem. The opening line tells the readers about her grandmother's house, where she lived when she was very young. Moreover, the intensity of her grief is suggestively conveyed by the ellipses in the form of a few dots in this section of the poem. It was her disenchantment with her loveless marriage which reminded her of her grandmother's pure and selfless love. Her heart is itself like a dark window where the fresh air does not blow. The image of the house has stuck to her mind. The poet has also used the similes of a brooding dog show her inability to pay a visit to her grandmother's house. She has also used suggestive visual imagery of 'blind eyes of the windows' and 'the frozen air' to convey the idea of death and desperation.

## INTRODUCTION OF POETESS

**Kamala Das** (1934-2009) born in Kerala, Kamala Das began her literary career, like her mother, as a short story writer in Malayalam. She, however, achieved wider recognition as an

Indo-English poet with her widely read works like *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) *The Descendants* (1976) and *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973).

Reflecting a feminine sensibility and feminist understanding, the writings of Kamala Das reflect the tensions of modern India and a quest for fulfilment. She questions, asserts and defies through poetry of polemics and emotional intensity foregrounding a body of woman-specific experience. Her conscious rejection and adoption of various identities and names reflect an impassioned search for a comfortable persona in a highly divisive society.

She was noted for her many Malayalam short stories as well as many poems written in English. Das was also a syndicated columnist. She once claimed that "poetry does not sell in this country [India]," but her forthright columns, which sounded off on everything from women's issues and child care to politics, were popular.

Das's *My Story*, as Scroll. It has previously written, was "one of the most brutally honest telling of what it was like to be an independent-minded woman in India, catapulting Das to The status of an icon for women yearning to escape the domestic oppression and forge a sexual identity".

## **SUMMARY OF THE POEM**

"*My Grandmother's House*" is a constituent poem of Kamala Das's maiden publication *summer in Calcutta*. Though short, the poem wraps within itself an intriguing sense of nostalgia and up rootedness. In her eternal quest for love in such a 'loveless' world, the poet remembers her grandmother which surfaces some emotions long forgotten and buried within her-- an ironical expression of her past which is a tragic contrast to her present situation. It is a forcefully moving poem fraught with nostalgia and anguish.

The poet says that there is a house, her grandmother's home, far away from where she currently resides, where she "received love". Her grandmother's home was a place she felt

secure and was loved by all. After the death of her grandmother, the poet says that even the House was filled with grief, and accepted the seclusion with resignation. Only dead silence haunted over the House, feeling of desolation wandering throughout. She recollects though she couldn't read books at that time, yet she had a feeling of snakes moving among them-- a feeling of deadness, horror and repulsion, and this feeling made her blood go cold and turn her face pale like the moon. She often thinks of going back to that Old House, just to peek through the "blind eyes of the windows" which have been dead-shut for years, or just to listen to the "frozen" air.

The poet also shows the ironical contrast between her past and present and says that her present has been so tormenting that even the Darkness of the House that is bathed in Death does not horrify her anymore and it is a rather comforting companion for her in the present state of trials. The poet says that she would gladly ("in wild despair") pick up a handful of Darkness from the House and bring it back to her home to "lie behind my bedroom door" so that the memories of the Old House and its comforting darkness, a rather ironical expression, might fill assurance and happiness in her present life.

She wraps up the poem saying that it is hard for one to believe that she once lived in such a house and was so loved by all and lived her life with pride. That her world was once filled with happiness is a sharp contrast to her present situation where she is completely devoid of love and pride. She says that in her desperate quest for love, she has lost her way; since she didn't receive any feelings of love from the people whom she called her own, she now has to knock "at strangers' doors" and beg them for love, if not in substantial amounts, then at least in small change i.e. in little measure at least.

The poet has intensified the emotions of nostalgia and anguish by presenting a contrast between her childhood and her grown-up stages. The fullness of the distant and absence and

the emptiness of the near and the present give the poem its poignancy. The images of “snakes moving among books”, blood turning “cold like the moon”, “blind eyes of window”, “frozen air” evoke a sense of death and despair. The house itself becomes a symbol - an Edenic world, a cradle of love and joy. The escape, the poetic retreat, is in fact, the poet’s own manner of suggesting the hopelessness of her present situation. Her yearning for the house is a symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity.

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## **SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES**

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## **UNIT 3 - Women's Writing - SHS1205**

## SHORT STORIES

### THE GARDEN PARTY

- Katherine Mansfield

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp Murry was born on 14th October 1888 in the colonial New Zealand. She was a prominent short fiction writer and wrote under the pen name Katherine Mansfield. She left for Britain in 1908 where she befriended DH Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. During the First World War Mansfield contracted extra pulmonary tuberculosis which made her return to New Zealand impossible and she died at the age of 34. Among her most well known stories are *The Garden Party*, *The Daughter's of the Late Colonel* and *The Fly*.

*The Garden Party* was first published in 1922 in a collection entitled *The Garden Party and Other Stories* and it immediately became a success. Mansfield mainly deals with New Zealand, childhood, adulthood, social class, class conflict, innocence and experience.

#### GIST OF THE STORY:

Katherine Mansfield's short story "*The Garden Party*" opens with frantic preparations being made for an afternoon garden party. The main character, Laura, is an idealistic and sensitive young girl. She is surrounded by her more conventional family: her sister, Jose, her mother, Mrs. Sheridan; her father, a businessman; and her brother, Laurie, to whom she feels most similar in feeling and ideals.

The weather, a cloudless summer day, was suitable for a party that day. Before the breakfast was over, the workers were concerned about where to place the marquee. Meg had already washed her hair and was sitting drinking her coffee. Jose had also got ready. So mother,



Mrs.Sheridan, assigned the job of handling the men to Laura. She was very artistic in nature. She goes outside to do her duty.

When she spoke to the workmen, she found that they were very friendly and soft spoken and she liked them very much. There were suggestions to put the marquee on the lily lawn, on the corner of the tennis court from Laura, but at last it was placed against the karakas. Though Laura was in charge of the whole thing she felt confused because the worker's knew better. She liked the workmen for their concern for the beauty of flowers and she even wished the workmen be her friends instead of the silly boys she danced with and who came to the Sunday night supper. She despised the stupid conventions of class discriminations and wanted to be a work girl.

A voice from the house called Laura to the phone. When she reached the hall Laurie, her brother, told her to press his coat before the afternoon. She nodded and went to the phone. It was her friend Kitty on the other side. She invited her to lunch and following the instruction of her mother, told her to wear the sweet hat she had. She put back the receiver and listened all around. The house was alive. She heard running voices everywhere. Everyone was busy with the preparation of the party, and she loved parties very much. A florist came with a lot of cannalillies for the garden party to look gorgeous. Meg played the piano in case she was asked to play it in the afternoon. Mother told everyone to dress up quickly and help her with the envelopes. Godber's brought in cream puffs. Everything was going very well.

Laura wanted to go to the workers in the garden to see if they could place the marquee well. But the back door was blocked by cook, Sadie, Godber's man and Hans. Something had happened. A man was killed. Mr. Scott, who lived in a little cottage nearby, was killed when his horse shied at a traction- engine in the corner of Hawke Street this morning and he was thrown out on the back of his head. He's survived by a wife and five little children.

Hearing the news of this death, Laura felt like stopping the party. She thought that it is not suitable for them to have a garden party when a neighbour is dead. She expressed this to everyone but none of them were least bothered. Mother was even amused of hearing the death. Mother instead diverted the topic on to the hat which was made for her. But when she reached her room and saw herself in the mirror, she too felt that mother was right. Laura wanted to inform Laurie about the accident but she couldn't.

The party was over. It was a great success altogether. Some people mentioned the accident at the party. People sympathized with the wife and half a dozen kiddies. Mrs. Sheridan had a brilliant idea of sending all the waste, the scraps of the food to the house of the dead as a treat to his children. Laura was assigned this job. Laura, in her white frocks and her beautiful hat went down the hill, down the lane to the place where a man lay dead. She felt that everyone was looking at her. Her frock and her hat shone very well. She thought that she could have put on a coat. She reached the house. She was taken inside by a woman. She was shocked to see the widow, the children and above all the dead man. When Laura went near the dead man; she felt that he was in a fast and sound sleep. He was far away, in a remote place, he was dreaming; garden parties, baskets and lace frocks meant nothing to him. He was wonderful and beautiful even in death. She couldn't leave the room without a sob. She cried "forgive my hat". She ran back. Laurie was waiting on the way. Mother was becoming anxious. Laura was crying. She was not able to explain what life is. She still couldn't utter anything. She simply stammered "Isn't life, isn't life" that was enough. Laurie understood everything.

The story is about a little girl Laura, who sheds all her innocence once she witnesses the reality of life. A girl who was stuck in a world of high class housing, food, family and garden parties discovers reality upon witnessing death. For Laura, death is fast sleep far away from the troubles of human life.

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# **GIRLS**

-Mrinal Pande

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mrinal Pande was born in 1946, at Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh. She was the editor of the popular women's magazine *Vama* from 1984-87 and is currently the executive editor of the Hindi edition of *Daily Hindusthan*. She has studied English and Sanskrit literature, ancient Indian history, archaeology, classical music and visual arts. Her first story was published in the Hindi weekly *Dharmayug* at the age of 21. She writes both in Hindi and English and has authored many short stories, novels and drama. Her major works include *The Subject is Woman* (1991), *That Which Ram Hath Ordained* (1993), *My Own Witness* (2001), *Devi: Tales of the Goddess* (2000) and *Stepping Out* (2003). *Girls* was first published in 1983 in *Dharmayug*, and the English translation in the same year in *Manushi*- a journal about women and society, New Delhi.

## **GIST OF THE STORY:**

The story is narrated by an eight year old girl, the second daughter of a middle class family in an Indian society. It deals with the way girls are treated in our society. The story begins with the protagonist, a little girl who leaves home to her Ma's parental house. Ma is a very irritable person, for her, everything in life is a problem; breaking the surahi by Baabu, children at home or school, ill or playing around, everything is a problem. She is going through her fourth pregnancy and fervently hopes that it will be a boy this time.

When they reach the station, Ma had to handle many things; mind the luggage, the wobbling surahi, and the three children. At one of the stations they bought many samosas but the girl couldn't eat it because she saw a woman making her child pee through the window.

The narrator girl scared her younger sister by crushing a piece of potato into the shape of an insect. Her elder sister scolded her calling her a nuisance but despite that she realizes that she loves the narrator very much.

Maama was waiting at the railway station to receive them. When they reached Naani's home, another surahi was broken. This time Ma blamed the girl for troding on it. "You are the cause of all my problem!" This was the reaction of the mother. When she entered Naani's house, she was told to bend down and touch Naani's feet. When she tried to do it, someone rectified her saying "Not like that... bend properly. You are born a girl and you will have to bend for the rest of your life". For Ma, the girls are always a nuisance. She keeps on complaining about her girl children.

Every one in the family talks of delivering a boy. For Naani, it has become a matter of safeguarding her honor. She folds her hands and prays "Oh goddess, protect my honor. At least this time let her take a son back from her parent's home". For Ma giving birth to a boy is all about relieving herself from the burden of delivery forever.

The girl is addressed as a witch by her mother when she came to know that the girl has eaves dropped the conversation of Ma and Maami. Ma gets angry with her when she insists Hari's mother on saying that girls are nice. Mother remarks "she was born only to plague my life".

The next day was Chaitya Shukla Ashtami day of the Hindu calendar when young girls are worshipped as the living incarnations of Devi or the divine feminine principle. A roli spot or tikka of red powder is put on the girl's foreheads, the aarati ceremony is done by waving the sacred flame around their faces, and Prasad, food given to the devotees after the worship, is distributed to all the participating women. The girl didn't allow Naani to put tikka on her forehead. Instead of that, she feels that she is an engine. Ma gets angry with her and shouts at her. When the elders try to coax her to obey, the girl retorts, "When you people don't love girls,

why do you pretend to worship them? ..... I don't want this halwa-puri, tikka or money. I don't want to be a goddess".

The story tells us about the unjustified idolatry of the male child in an Indian society. Indian families always had in need of male children as they were supposed to be the bread winners and caretakers of the family. When a girl child is born, condolences are showered on the family whereas when a boy child is born ladoos are distributed in and outside the family. Indian society, despite all the modernization and progress, continues to victimize girl children and they are looked down as the inferior 'other'. The author presents a middle class family where there is a compulsion to give birth to a boy to stop bearing children anymore.

Girls in Indian families are told to bend and live and are not respected or even acknowledged as boys are. The story is told from a child's perspective and it effectively brings out the actual feelings of a girl child when she is discriminated in her own home. For Ma, her children are always creating problems. Had they been sons and even if they had been naughty she would not have been angry, because sons are always considered as assets to the family.

The little girl's cry and anguish at the end of the story is the voice of all the girls in Indian society. One day worship of the girl child, one day viewing the girl as Devi shows the hypocritical nature of the rituals in our society. It is contrasted to the subjugation of girls happening every moment. Rituals in itself have become a formality. The whole story is a wake up cry of the narrator and the author, on behalf of all the girls in India, to realize the value of girls and the respect and care they need from their own home.

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# THE COLOR PURPLE

-Alice Walker

## Brief Biography of Alice Walker:

Born to a farmer father and a mother who worked as a maid, Alice Walker was sent to school at a young age, which was still fairly rare for African American children in Georgia at the time, as their farm-work for white landowners was believed not to require any formal schooling. Walker graduated first in her high school class, and studied at Spelman and Sarah Lawrence Colleges. She became active in the civil rights movement, and later helped revive interest in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, an African American writer from earlier in the twentieth century. Walker wrote *The Color Purple* in the early 1980s, and it brought her a great deal of immediate attention and fame. The book won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, and was made into a movie by Stephen Spielberg (starring, among others, Whoopi Goldberg and Oprah Winfrey). Walker continues to write novels, short stories, and poetry, a good deal of it inspired by her early-life experiences growing up in rural Georgia.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Celie, a young girl who lives with her abusive father, her sick mother, and her younger sister Nettie, begins writing letters to **God**. In her first letters, she details how her father has been sexually abusing her. Celie becomes pregnant twice, and each time her father gives away the children.

A man named Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ begins courting Nettie. Celie encourages Nettie's marriage to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ because Celie fears her father (Pa) will soon turn his sexual attentions toward Nettie. But Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ does not permit Nettie to marry Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, instead insisting that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ marry Celie, since she is older and a hard-worker. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ believes Celie to be ugly, but



eventually is convinced to marry her, because he has several children by his previous wife (who was murdered), and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ needs someone to take care of them.

Celie marries Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and moves in with him. Nettie later escapes Pa and lives with Celie and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ for a brief period. But Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ still has designs on Nettie, and Nettie flees to town, staying with the Reverend Samuel and his wife Corrine, whom Celie once met, briefly. By coincidence, Samuel and Corrine have adopted Olivia and Adam, Celie's two children. Celie believed she recognized Olivia, when she saw her with Corrine in a shop. Nettie promises Celie she will write to her from her new home, but these letters never arrive.

Celie takes care of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s children, whom she considers "rotten" save for Harpo, the oldest, who marries a strong, hardworking woman named Sofia. Harpo becomes upset that he cannot get Sofia to obey him; both Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and Celie (at first) recommend that Harpo beat Sofia. But when Celie sees how Harpo's attempts at beating have hurt both Harpo and Sofia, Celie apologizes to Sofia, and the two become friends.

Shug Avery, a lover from Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s past, comes to town, sick, and stays with Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. They strike up their affair once more, with Celie's knowledge. Celie has been fixated on Shug since seeing a picture of her, on a playbill, when Celie was a girl. Celie and Shug become friends and confidantes, and, later, lovers. Shug begins to sing at a bar Harpo has built behind his shack, after Sofia leaves him (she is tired of being beaten and ordered around by Harpo). Celie tells Shug about her father's sexual abuse, and about Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s beatings. Shug promises to protect Celie.

Shug and Celie discover that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ has been hiding, for years, the letters Nettie has been sending to Celie. Celie reads the letters and discovers that Nettie, upon moving in with Samuel and Corrine, and their two children Olivia and Adam, began studying to be a missionary in Africa. Nettie then traveled with the family to Harlem, in New York City, on to England, and to various cities in Africa, observing the culture and traditions of the people there,

before settling in a village of the Olinka people. Nettie works for Samuel and Corrine, aids in the education of Olivia and Adam, and comes to know a girl named Tashi, whose mother, Catherine, does not approve of Tashi being educated in the Western manner. Celie begins writing letters to Nettie rather than to God.

Corrine, it is revealed, believes that Samuel has had an affair with Nettie back in Georgia, and that Adam and Olivia are actually Nettie's children. This is why, Corrine thinks, Olivia and Adam so resemble Nettie. Nettie swears to Corrine that the two children are her sister Celie's, and Samuel corroborates her story, adding that Celie and Nettie's "Pa" is really their stepfather, and that their biological father was lynched, after his dry-goods store became too successful in the eyes of his white neighbors in Georgia.

Back in Georgia, Celie, spurred on by Shug, confronts Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ for withholding Nettie's letters for so many years. Celie, Shug, Shug's husband Grady (whom she has married in the interim), and Squeak, Harpo's second wife, move to Memphis, where Shug continues her singing career (Shug already has a house there). Celie begins making pants, a business she will continue for the remainder of the novel, and Squeak and Grady fall in love and move away. Sofia, who was arrested years back for attacking the mayor and his wife after they acted disrespectfully to her, has been serving as the mayor's family maid for twelve years. She is finally released to Celie's home toward the end of the novel. Her children, raised by Harpo and Squeak, no longer recognize her.

Meanwhile, the Olinka village is destroyed by British rubber companies, who plow over the Olinkas crops and hunting land, and charge the Olinka rent and a water tax. Dispirited by their inability to save the village, Samuel, Nettie, and the children return to England after Corrine dies of illness.

In England, Samuel and Nettie realize that they are in love, and marry; they tell Olivia and Adam that their biological mother is Celie, and vow to reunite the families in Georgia.

After one last trip to Africa, in which Tashi and Adam are married, Tashi, Adam, Olivia, Nettie, and Samuel arrive at Celie's house in Georgia—the house she inherited from her biological father after her stepfather's death—and find Celie's family in good order. Shug, who had run away for a time with a young man name Germaine for a last fling, has come back to live with Celie and be reconciled with Mr. \_\_\_\_; Mr. \_\_\_\_ himself has found religion and apologized to Celie for mistreating her (he has even carved Celie a **purple** frog, as a form of apology) and Squeak, Sofia, Harpo, and the remainder of the family realize that, although a great deal has happened over the past thirty years, they, as a family, feel younger and more energetic than ever before.

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## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- **Celie** – The novel's protagonist, at the beginning of the novel Celie is quiet, passive, and able to express herself only through letters to God. As a teenager she is repeatedly raped by her father (later revealed to be her stepfather), Pa, and gives birth to two children, Olivia and Adam, whom her stepfather gives away and who are raised by a missionary couple. Celie is then married off to Mr. \_\_\_\_, who wants her only for her work ethic and regularly beats her. Celie tries to protect her sister, Nettie, and helps her to run away first from Pa and then from Mr. \_\_\_\_ when both try to rape her, too, at different times. Celie's attempts to get free of the men in her life, to discover her sexuality and to learn to love (both primarily through the female singer Shug Avery), to gain both her social and emotional independence, to find spiritual satisfaction and connection to God, and to find Nettie form the drama of the book, which is constructed as a series of letters between Celie and **God**, and between Celie and Nettie.

- **Nettie** – Celie's more attractive younger sister. Forced to leave first her own home when Pa turns his sexual attention to her and then Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s house after he makes sexual advances toward her, Nettie ends up helping out in the household of Reverend Samuel and his wife Corrine. The three of them, and the couple's adopted children Adam and Olivia (who are Celie's biological children), travel to Africa to serve as missionaries to the Olinka people. There, Nettie becomes educated and gains a new spiritual understanding of the world that mirrors Celie's own, and later marries Samuel after Corrine dies of disease. Nettie is later reunited with her sister, and she, as step-mother to Adam and Olivia, introduces the children to their biological mother at the novel's end.
- **Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (Albert)** – An abusive husband who emotionally and physically abuses Celie in order to control her. He carries on a relationship with the singer Shug throughout much of their marriage. He has multiple children by multiple women, but his overriding love is for Shug. After both Shug and Celie leave him, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ realizes how much he depended on them and how cruelly he acted toward Celie in particular. He "finds religion" and apologizes to Celie, and they close out the novel as friends; Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ gives Celie a **purple** frog to symbolize their new friendship.
- **Shug Avery** – A singer who is considered a "nasty woman" by those in the community, because she has relationships with numerous men, Shug becomes friends (and, later, lovers) with Celie, teaching Celie about sexuality, love, and spirituality in the process. She also carries on a long-standing relationship with Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, who is married to Celie for much of that time. After leaving Celie, with whom she was living in Memphis, for

"one last fling" with a young man named Germaine, Shug returns to Celie and lives in her home in Georgia.

- **Sofia** – A strong-minded and physically strong woman, and first wife of Harpo. She does not brook any discrimination from white people or physical or other efforts to control her by men, Sofia is sent to prison for fighting the (white) mayor and his wife. She later serves as maid in the mayor's house for almost twelve years, helping to raise his children. Sofia then returns to Celie's home, where her own children with Harpo no longer recognize her.
- **Harpo** –Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s oldest son, who is raised by Celie. Harpo is an essentially good man, but he drives Sofia, his first wife, away by trying to get her to "mind" (or obey) him. Harpo later marries a woman named Squeak, or Mary Agnes, and opens a jukejoint (bar) on his property in Georgia.
- **Squeak** – Harpo's second wife, Squeak begins the novel as a physically weak and unimposing woman, who comes into her own over the course of the novel. She later leaves Harpo to run off with Grady, Shug's husband, in order to have a singing career. Squeak then returns to Celie's home just before the novel's end.
- **Eleanor Jane, Stanley Earl, and Reynolds** – Eleanor Jane, the mayor's daughter, becomes close to Sofia, the woman who raised her. Sofia is civil to Eleanor's husband Stanley Earl, but Sofia refuses to gush and dote upon Reynolds, their son, explaining to Eleanor that she (Sofia) has already been made to care for a white family that is not hers, at the expense of caring for her own family.

- **Samuel** – A reverend, married to Corrine. Kind and good, Samuel adopts two children, Olivia and Adam, who are given to him by Pa (and who turn out to be Celie's children). He and his wife also take in Nettie after she flees from Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s house, not realizing that she is the children's aunt. He travels with his wife, two children, and Nettie, to Africa, where he serves as a missionary to the Olinka. After his wife's death, Samuel marries Nettie, and the entire family travels back to Georgia to reunite with Celie.
- **Corrine** – Samuel's wife, Corrine doubts, until just before her death, that Samuel is telling the truth about the children—Corrine believes that Samuel and Nettie had an affair, and that Olivia and Adam are therefore Samuel and Nettie's biological children. Corrine finally believes Nettie, however, before she succumbs to her illness and dies among the Olinka.
- **Adam**– Nettie's stepson and Celie's son, Adam grows up in Africa, raised by Nettie, Samuel, and Corrine. After the Olinka woman he loves, Tashi, undergoes the ritual facial scarring of her tribe, and then is ashamed of having done so, he undergoes the same scarring. He marries Tashi before moving back to the United States with his family.
- **Celie and Nettie's mother** – After the death of her husband who is lynched by a gang of white men, Celie and Nettie's mother falls into a deep depression. She eventually marries Pa, and never tells the girls that Pa is not their actual father. As she lies depressed in bed, Pa rapes Celie. She dies early in the story.

- **Pa (Alphonso)** – Celie's sexually-abusive father, Pa is later revealed to be Celie's stepfather, meaning that Celie can inherit her biological father's house and dry-goods business after Pa's death, and that the children she bore as a result of Pa's sexual abuse were not the product of incest.
- **Olivia** – Adam's sister, Olivia is recognized by Celie early in the novel as being her biological daughter when she spots her with Corrine in a store, but Olivia is raised by Samuel, Corrine, and Nettie, and is not reunited with Celie until the very end of the book.
- **Tashi** – An Olinka girl educated in the Western manner, Tashi elects to undergo the ritual female circumcision and face scarring of the Olinka, then feels ashamed of having done so. She ends the novel by marrying Adam and moving to the United States with him, Nettie, and Samuel.

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## THEMES

- **RACE AND RACISM**

The novel takes place in two distinct settings—rural Georgia and a remote African village—both suffused with problems of race and racism. Celie believes herself to be ugly in part because of her very dark skin. Sofia, after fighting back against the genteel racism of the mayor and his wife, ends up serving as maid to that family, and as surrogate mother to Eleanor, who does not initially recognize the sacrifices Sofia has been forced to make. In general, very few career paths are open to the African Americans in the novel: for the men, farming is the main occupation, although Harpo

manages to open a bar. For women, it seems only possible to serve as a mother, or to perform for a living, to sing as Squeak and Shug Avery do.

In Africa, the situation Nettie, Samuel, Corrine, Adam, Tashi, and Olivia experience is not that much different. Nettie recalls that the ancestors of the Olinka, with whom she lives, sold her ancestors into slavery in America. The Olinka view African Americans with indifference. Meanwhile the English rubber workers, who build roads through the village and displace the Olinka from their ancient land, have very little concern for that people's history in Africa. The British feel that, because they are developing the land, they "own" it, and the African people who have lived there for centuries are merely "backward" natives. It is only at the very end of the novel, after Samuel, Nettie, and their family have returned from Africa, to Celie's home in Georgia, that Celie and Nettie's entire family is able to come together and dine—a small gift, and something that would be considered completely normal for the white families of that time period, whose lives had not been ripped apart by the legacy of slavery and poverty.

- **MEN, WOMEN, AND GENDER ROLES**

The novel is also an extended meditation on the nature of men, women, and their expected gender roles. In the beginning, Celie is expected to serve her abusive father, and, later, her husband Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, and Nettie, not wanting to do either, runs away. But Nettie sacrifices the job generally reserved for women—motherhood—in order to educate herself and work for Samuel and Corrine during their missionary labors in Africa. Celie, meanwhile, has two children, whom Nettie then raises in Africa, coincidentally—Celie only leaves behind the drudgery of housework when Shug comes to live with her and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and begins to teach Celie about her body and about other



ways of living, outside the control of men. Celie and Squeak, Harpo's second wife, end up living with Shug in Memphis, and Celie is able to start her pants-making company.

The men in the novel, however, experience a different trajectory. It is expected that black men of this time, especially in the South, work in the fields, and that women obey them absolutely. But after Shug and then Celie leave him behind, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ realizes just how much he took for granted and how much he, and his son Harpo, have relied on the work of women throughout their lives. Similarly, in Africa, Nettie manages both to achieve the gender role initially expected of her (by marrying the widower Samuel), and keeps working and forging her own path in life, eventually spending over twenty years as a missionary in Africa.

The end of the novel, then, celebrates both the continuity of family, populated both by strong female characters and repentant male ones, and the fact that "families," and the roles within them, are fluid, often overlapping, and part of a long arc toward equality and greater understanding, even if that arc is often dotted with tragedy, abuse, and neglect.

- **VIOLENCE AND SUFFERING**

Violence and suffering in *The Color Purple* are typically depicted as part of a greater cycle of tragedy taking place both on the family level and on a broader social scale. Celie is raped by her stepfather and beaten for many years by her husband, only to have Shug Avery intervene on her behalf. Sofia is nearly beaten to death by white police officers after pushing a white family; she nearly dies in prison. Nettie is almost raped by her stepfather and by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, and must run away in order to protect herself. Harpo tries, unsuccessfully, to beat and control Sofia, his first wife, and he beats Squeak until she leaves him for Grady (though Squeak returns to Celie's home at the end of the

novel). These cycles of violence are repeated across the South: Celie's biological father and uncles were lynched by whites jealous of their business success, and there is always the threat that, if black people agitate too much for their rights, they will be struck down by the white people who control the local and state government.

In Africa, too, this violence occurs within the local culture and in the relation between whites and blacks. Men in the Olinka village have absolute control over their wives, and a scarring ritual takes place for all women going through permanently, leaving their faces permanently marked. The white British rubber dealers who take over the Olinka land end up killing a great many in the village, without concern for the humanity or customs of the Olinka, who have lived there for many years. But despite all this violence and suffering, there is a core of hope in the novel: the hope that Celie and Nettie might be reunited. It is this hope that, eventually, stops the cycle of violence, at least within Celie's family, and enables the reunion of many of the family members in Georgia at the novel's end.

- **SELF-DISCOVERY**

The novel is, ultimately, a journey of self-discovery for Celie, and for other characters. Celie begins the novel as a passive, quiet young girl, perplexed by her own pregnancy, by her rape at the hands of Pa, and her ill-treatment by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. Slowly, after meeting Shug and seeing her sister run away, Celie develops practical skills: she is a hard worker in the fields, she learns how to manage a house and raise children, and she meets other inspiring women, including Sofia, who has always had to fight the men in her life. Further, she discovers her own sexuality and capacity to love through her developing romance with Shug. Eventually, Celie discovers that her sister Nettie has been writing to her all along, and this, coupled with Shug's support, allows Celie to confront Mr.

\_\_\_\_\_, to move to Memphis with Shug, to begin her own pants company, and, eventually, to make enough money to be independent. Celie's luck begins to change: she inherits her biological father's estate, allowing her greater financial freedom, and she manages to repair her relationship with Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (he gives her a **purple** frog as a symbol of his recognition of his earlier bad behavior), and create a kind of family with Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ Shug, Harpo, Sofia, Squeak, Nettie, and her own children. Nettie's arc is also one of self-discovery. Nettie received more years of schooling than did Celie, and Nettie has seen the world, working as a missionary in Africa, and eventually marrying a kind and intelligent man. But Nettie also realizes that she can balance her independence, and her desire to work, with a loving married life that also includes two stepchildren—Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Indeed, it is the arrival of this extended family on Celie's land at the end of the novel that signals the last stage in both Celie's and Nettie's journey of self-discovery. The sisters have found themselves, and now, as the novel closes, they have found each other.

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## SYMBOLS

- **PURPLE**

The novel, of course, is called *The Color Purple*, and though the color itself does not appear in many places throughout the text, it is clear that **purple** is associated with Celie, and with Celie's transformation from a young girl to a mature woman. As Alice Walker writes in a preface to the novel, purple "is always a surprise but is found everywhere in nature." From the beginning, Celie shows that purple is her favorite color—she asks Kate, Mr.'s sister, to buy her clothing and shoes in purple, but they end up being too expensive. When Celie returns to Georgia, after having lived with Shug in a romantic relationship, and having started her own pant-making business, Mr. carves

for Celie a purple frog, symbolizing a comment Celie made to Mr. long after her relationship with Shug, saying that men have always reminded her of frogs. Just as Celie always possessed the inner strength necessary to allow her strike out on her own and to break free of Mr.'s and Pa's influence, the color purple *is* found in nature, in flowers especially, yet it seems an impossible joy, something that ought not to be there—and an indicator of God's influence on earth.

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## **SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES**

### **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

## **UNIT 5 - Women's Writing - SHS1205**

# **A RAISIN IN THE SUN**

**-Lorraine Hansberry**

## **Brief Biography of Lorraine Hansberry**

Hansberry was raised in an African-American middle-class family with activist foundations. The granddaughter of a slave and the niece of a prominent African-American professor, Hansberry grew up with a keen awareness of African-American history and the ongoing struggle for civil rights. In 1938 Hansberry's family moved to an all-white neighborhood in Chicago and suffered violent attacks from neighbors, who had signed a restrictive covenant to exclude black families from the community. Hansberry's family fought the covenant all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the Hansberrys in 1940. Hansberry attended the University of Wisconsin for several years before dropping out and moving to New York in 1950 to pursue writing and social activism. Hansberry's best known work, *A Raisin in the Sun*, premiered in 1959, making her the first African-American female playwright to have a play produced on Broadway. Hansberry died of pancreatic cancer at 34, in 1965.

## **Plot Summary**

*A Raisin in the Sun* examines the effects of racial prejudice on the fulfillment of an African-American family's dreams. The play centers on the Youngers, a working-class family that lives in Chicago's South Side during the mid-twentieth century. Shortly before the play begins, the head of the Younger family, Big Walter, dies, leaving the family to inherit a \$10,000 life insurance payment. The family eagerly awaits the arrival of the insurance check, which has the potential to make the family's long deferred dreams into reality. However, the members of the Younger family have conflicting ideas—conflicting dreams—regarding the best use for the money, which causes tension.

At the beginning of the play Mama, Big Walter's widow, expresses uncertainty regarding the best use for the money. Mama tells her daughter-in-law, Ruth, that she and her late husband shared the dream of owning a house, but that poverty and racism prevented them from fulfilling this dream during Big Walter's lifetime. Mama's daughter, Beneatha, aspires to attend medical school and become a doctor, a considerable challenge for an African-American woman at that time. Beneatha's older brother, Walter Lee, belittles his sister's dream, instead suggesting that she simply get married. Walter wants to use the insurance payment as an investment in a liquor store, an idea that Mama and his wife Ruth both dislike. Ruth, worried about her troubled marriage and the family's cramped living situation, shares Mama's hope for a house, although she is willing to support her husband's dream because, as she tells Mama, "He needs this chance." Walter finds his job as a white man's chauffeur demeaning and he sees the liquor store investment as the only path towards a better future.

On the same day that the check arrives, Ruth finds out that she is pregnant, which makes her question whether the family can afford to raise another child. Knowing that Ruth is considering an abortion, Mama begs Walter to convince his wife to keep the baby. Walter is unable to say anything and leaves the apartment. As Mama watches her family "falling apart," she makes the decision to place a down payment on a home in the white neighborhood of Clybourne Park, hoping that her choice to "do something bigger" will bring the family together.

Mama's decision to purchase a house only sends Walter deeper into despair as he sees the opportunity to fulfill his dream disappear. On the other hand, the new house fills Ruth with joy and hope for her family, helping her to imagine the possibility of a happy future for her unborn child. Several weeks later, Walter continues to grow more despondent and skips work three days in a row. As Mama realizes that "I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you," she decides to transfer control of the household and the rest of the insurance

money to Walter, asking only that he set aside a portion for Beneatha's schooling. Mama's decision reinvigorates Walter.

A week later, the family is happily preparing for its move when Karl Lindner arrives and tells them of Clybourne Park's offer to buy their new home as a way to dissuade the family from moving to the neighborhood. The family confidently refuses the offer. Moments later, Walter's friend Bobo enters and tells Walter that Willy Harris has disappeared with the liquor store investment. Without heeding Mama's advice, Walter had invested the entirety of the insurance money in the liquor store, and the loss leaves the family on the brink of financial ruin.

An hour later, the Nigerian student Joseph Asagai visits Beneatha and finds her distraught over the lost money. Asagai asks Beneatha to marry him and "come home" to Africa with him, a sudden proposal that Beneatha says she will need to consider. Soon after, Walter informs the family that he will accept Lindner's offer, which greatly disappoints them. However, as Walter and his son, Travis, face Lindner, Walter reclaims his dignity and refuses Lindner's offer. Excited but well aware of the dangers that await them, the Youngers leave their apartment and head to their new home.

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## THEMES

### • DREAMS

Dreams possess great importance in *A Raisin in the Sun*, with the play's name coming from a 1951 Langston Hughes poem titled *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. In the poem, part of which serves as the play's epigraph (a quotation at the beginning of a book that elaborates on its major themes) the poet asks, "What happens to a dream deferred?" pondering whether it shrivels up "like a raisin in the sun" or explodes. Hughes' open question forms the basis of Hansberry's work, with the intertwined and conflicting ambitions of the Youngers driving the play's plot.



Each character clings to distinct dreams, which have long been deferred due to socioeconomic limitations placed on the family by racism. The persistence of these dreams lends the play a pervasive sense of hope, despite the conclusion's foreshadowing of coming struggles for the family in Clybourne. Mama and her late husband Big Walter's dream of owning a home forms the crux of the play. Clinging to a dream deferred for nearly 35 years, Mama recalls Big Walter's statement that it seems "like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams," linking the postponement of her dream to racial inequality. Ironically, it is Big Walter's death, with its resulting \$10,000 insurance payment, that makes the realization of Mama's dream possible by the end of the play. Like Mama, Ruth clings to the dream of a home, which generates conflict with her husband, Walter Lee, who dreams of becoming a self-sufficient business owner. Similarly, Walter's dream of owning a liquor store (one of the few business ventures open to an African-American man in mid-century Chicago) stands in stark contrast to his sister Beneatha's dream of becoming a doctor. However, by the play's end, Walter's lost investment places both his and Beneatha's dreams in jeopardy, casting a shadow over the play's semi-hopeful conclusion, which centers on Mama's actualized dream. With the insurance money gone, Walter's and Beneatha's dreams for the future appear in danger of further postponement, recalling broader struggles with social forces beyond the characters' control.

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# CLOUD NINE

-Caryl Churchill

## Introduction

*Cloud Nine*, by British playwright Caryl Churchill, was first performed at Dartington College of Arts in February 1979 by the Joint Stock Theatre Group. It was then performed on tour at the Royal Court Theatre in London and was first staged in New York in 1981. *Cloud Nine*, which can be found in Churchill's *Plays One* (London and New York, 1985), was a popular and critical success. In addition to frequently being very amusing, the play highlights colonial and gender oppression. The first act is set in the nineteenth century in an African country ruled by Britain, and Churchill satirizes the repressive nature of the Victorian family, the rigidity of narrowly prescribed gender roles, and the phenomenon whereby oppressed peoples in colonized countries take on the identity of the colonizers. Act two takes place in London one hundred years later with mostly the same characters, who have aged only twenty-five years. In this act, Churchill explores such topics as women's liberation, gay liberation, and the sexual revolution, all of which were prominent social movements in Britain, as well as the United States, in the 1970s.

## Overview

*Cloud 9* is a two-act play by the British playwright Caryl Churchill, first performed in 1979. Its first act is set in the nineteenth century, in colonial Africa, while the second act takes place in London in 1979; however, the characters from Act I reappear in Act II, and for them, only twenty-five years have passed between acts. This contrapuntal structure allows Churchill to explore how far political repression—along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism—has altered during the course of the twentieth century. This theme is reinforced by the casting: each character is played by different actors in each of the two acts, and Churchill calls for each

character to be played by an actor of the opposite sex in Act II. In Act I, the black servant Joshua is played by a white man.

The play opens in the home of Clive, a British colonial administrator in an African country. He leads his household—wife, Betty, children, Edward and Victoria, their governess, Ellen, Betty's mother, Maud and the native servant, Joshua—in a song celebrating the glories of England.

With the song over, Clive begins to entertain his wife with stories from his day: he has been managing a dispute between local tribes. Betty complains that Joshua has been rude to her, and Clive rebukes the servant.

Harry Bagley and Mrs. Saunders arrive. Harry is an explorer, fresh from an expedition to the interior. He and Betty immediately begin to flirt with one another, revealing a long-standing attraction. However, at the first opportunity, Harry and Joshua slip away to have sex with each other.

Mrs. Saunders is seeking protection; despite Clive's management, unrest among the local populace is growing. Clive shoos Mrs. Saunders away, following her out of the house to suppress her resistance. Then they return to the rest of the family. Clive makes a toast to the Queen.

Clive and Harry play catch with Edward until Clive becomes embarrassed by his son's fumbling. The game becomes hide-and-seek, and under its cover, Edward finds an opportunity to ask Harry to resume their sexual relationship. Elsewhere, the governess, Ellen, confesses to Betty that she loves her. Betty has eyes only for Harry and dismisses Ellen's confession as absurd.

Ellen notices that Edward is playing with a doll and hits him. When his father returns, Edward apologizes to him for playing with the doll. The characters depart for the verandah, but

Clive keeps Betty back. He tells her that he knows she has been having an affair with Harry. He lectures her on the dangers of lust before forgiving her.

Clive takes Harry aside to discuss the increasing unrest amongst the natives. Harry attempts to seduce Clive, who rebuffs him, horrified. Clive hurries away to find Mrs. Saunders, whom he tries to persuade to marry Clive, hoping to cure—or at least cover up—Harry's homosexuality. Mrs. Saunders refuses.

Clive is distracted by the news that British soldiers have killed Joshua's parents. He offers the servant his condolences. Resuming his mission to marry off Harry, he forces him to engage himself to Ellen. An engagement party follows, but Mrs. Saunders announces that she is leaving. Clive kisses her goodbye, provoking Betty to attack her. Clive is disgusted by Mrs. Saunders stooping to fight and he kicks her out.

As Clive raises his glass to salute Harry and Ellen, Joshua raises a rifle to shoot him. Edward can see Joshua, but he does not alert his father. The act ends on a blackout.

Act II begins about a hundred years later, as Victoria (only twenty-five years older) arrives at a London park with her friend Lin and Lin's daughter, Cathy. It is winter. While Cathy plays, Lin tells Victoria that she is a lesbian, and asks Victoria on a date. Edward appears, and so does Betty, who reveals that she is thinking of leaving Clive.

Time skips forwards: it is spring, and Edward is arguing with his lover, Gerry about Gerry's inability to commit. To the audience, Gerry admits having sex with a stranger on a train. Victoria arrives with her husband, Martin, who reveals that he is passionately in love with his wife. When he leaves, Lin arrives and tells Victoria that her brother has been killed in fighting in Belfast. Gerry and Edward return: Gerry breaks up with Edward.

Now it is a summer night. Victoria, Lin, and Edward are conducting a pagan sex ritual. As Martin arrives, they enlist him into what is becoming an orgy. Lin's dead brother

materializes and talks about his experiences as a soldier in Northern Ireland. Afterward, characters from Act I begin to appear.

Later in the summer, Victoria, Lin, and Edward are living together in a polyamorous household. Betty announces that she has rediscovered masturbation. Gerry and Edward become friends. While buying ice cream, Cathy is attacked by the Dead Hand Gang. The other characters begin to fight about who should have been looking after her, and all except Gerry and Betty leave. Betty explains that she has come to terms with her son's homosexuality. Betty from Act I appears: she and the new Betty embrace.

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