

KALEIDOSCOPE

Class XII Elective English Solution Book

CBSE NCERT



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Chapter 1: I Sell My Dreams

— Gabriel García Márquez

Stop and Think

Set 1 (Page 6)

Q1. How did the author recognise the lady who was extricated from the car encrusted in the wall of Havana Riviera Hotel after the storm?

Ans. The author did not recognise the lady by her face or name — both were unknown to him. What gave her away was the distinctive gold ring shaped like a serpent with emerald eyes that she wore on her finger. Thirty-four years earlier in Vienna, the author had met a woman called Frau Frieda who wore an identical ring on her right forefinger. When he read about the serpent ring in the newspaper account of the Havana disaster, he immediately suspected that the dead woman might be her. He could not confirm this with complete certainty, however, because he was unable to find out on which finger she wore it.

Q2. Why did the author leave Vienna never to return again?

Ans. Frau Frieda came to the students' tavern one night and whispered to the author that she had dreamed about him the night before. She told him, with great conviction, that he must leave Vienna immediately and not return for five years. The author, deeply influenced by her prophetic authority, boarded the last train to Rome that very night. From then on, he felt like a survivor of some catastrophe he had narrowly escaped, though he never knew what it was. Even later, when Frau Frieda told him in Barcelona that thirteen years had passed and it was now safe to return, the author replied that he would not go back — just in case. Thus, he never returned to Vienna.

Set 2 (Page 11)

Q1. How did Pablo Neruda know that somebody behind him was looking at him?

Ans. While the group was having lunch at Carvalleiras in Barcelona, Neruda abruptly stopped eating and said quietly to the author that there was someone behind him who would not stop staring at him. He did not turn around; it was as if he had some extra-sensory awareness or intuition about being watched. The author looked over Neruda's shoulder and confirmed that an intrepid woman in an old-fashioned felt hat and a purple scarf — who turned out to be Frau Frieda — was indeed staring at Neruda without pause.

Q2. How did Pablo Neruda counter Frau Frieda's claims to clairvoyance?

Ans. When the author encouraged Frau Frieda to talk about her prophetic dreams at the table, hoping to astonish Neruda, the poet paid no attention and declared from the outset: 'Only poetry is clairvoyant.' This dismissal placed creative imagination above any claim of dream-prophecy, suggesting that true vision belonged to the poet and not to those who interpret dreams. Later, in an ironic twist, Neruda himself dreamed about Frau Frieda — he dreamed that she was dreaming about him — which the author compared to something out of Borges. Coincidentally, Frau Frieda had the same dream. Yet even this coincidence did not make Neruda admit to the power of dream-prophecy; it only made him anxious that Borges might already have written the idea.

Understanding the Text

Q1. Did the author believe in the prophetic ability of Frau Frieda?

Ans. The author maintained a position of scepticism mixed with fascination. He never openly accepted that Frau Frieda's dreams were genuinely prophetic. When they met in Barcelona, he told her directly that he thought her dreams were 'no more than a stratagem for surviving.' He did, however, acknowledge that her conviction was so powerful that he boarded the train to Rome the very night she advised him to, and he considered himself, from that moment on, a survivor of some disaster he never actually experienced. This shows that while he intellectually doubted her, he was emotionally and psychologically susceptible to her authority. He remained under the spell of possibility — not believing, but not entirely disbelieving either.

Q2. Why did he think that Frau Frieda's dreams were a stratagem for surviving?

Ans. The author arrived at this conclusion through observation of how Frau Frieda used her 'gift.' Born into a modest family in old Caldas, Colombia, she moved to Vienna and, during the harsh winters there, offered her dreaming abilities as a service in exchange for shelter, food, and a salary. Over the years, she gradually gained complete authority over the household she served — even the smallest decisions were made based on her dream-interpretations. When the master of the house died, he left her a portion of his estate on the condition that she continue dreaming for his family. The author noticed that, 'dream by dream,' she had effectively taken over the entire fortune of her patrons in Vienna. To him, this pattern — using dreams as a tool to secure comfort, wealth, and power — was a clever survival strategy rather than genuine clairvoyance.

Q3. Why does the author compare Neruda to a Renaissance pope?

Ans. The comparison to a Renaissance pope captures Neruda's larger-than-life personality and his love of the sensory and material world. Like a Renaissance pope, Neruda was gluttonous yet refined — he ate three whole lobsters, dissecting them with the precision of a surgeon, while simultaneously eyeing everyone else's plates and tasting their food with childlike delight. He wore a bib during meals — not out of carelessness, but because it was the only way to protect his clothes from the sauces he devoured so enthusiastically. Despite his size and awkwardness, he moved with a kind of grandeur, and in any gathering he naturally presided over the table. He had an insatiable curiosity about the world, which he saw as 'an immense wind-up toy with which life invented itself.' This blend of appetite, refinement, authority, and wonder made him resemble the great, powerful, culturally exuberant popes of the Renaissance.

Talking about the Text

Q1. In spite of all the rationality that human beings are capable of, most of us are suggestible and yield to archaic superstitions.

Ans. This statement finds strong support in the story. The narrator is a rational, educated, literary person — and yet, a single dream-warning from Frau Frieda is enough to make him leave Vienna on the last train that very night. He spends years thinking of himself as a survivor of a catastrophe that never happened. Even decades later, when she offers him clearance to return, he refuses — 'just in case.' His behaviour illustrates how deeply irrational instincts run beneath the surface of even the most rational minds.

Frau Frieda's success itself rests on the suggestibility of educated, wealthy Viennese families who handed over the governance of their daily lives to her dream-interpretations. The poet Neruda dismisses her with sophisticated disdain, yet he too is shaken when he discovers he dreamed about her, mirroring her dream about him. The story suggests that superstition satisfies a fundamental human need — the need to believe that the randomness of the world can be deciphered, predicted, and controlled.

Q2. Dreams and clairvoyance are as much an element of the poetic vision as religious superstition.

Ans. García Márquez blurs the boundary between these three modes of perception throughout the story. Neruda, the archetypal poet, dismisses dream-prophecy but is himself possessed of an almost supernatural awareness — he senses without turning around that someone is staring at him. His declaration that 'only poetry is clairvoyant' is itself a kind of claim to visionary authority. The coincidence of his dream and Frau Frieda's dream — each dreaming that the other was dreaming of them — reads like a moment out of a Borges story (and the author says so), placing it in the realm of literary imagination.

Religious superstition, poetic vision, and dream-prophecy all rest on the same human impulse: the desire to perceive patterns and meaning in a world that defies rational explanation. García Márquez, the master of magical realism, treats all three with equal seriousness, neither endorsing nor dismissing any of them. In doing so, he suggests that the boundary between the mystical and the artistic is far thinner than we suppose.

Appreciation

Q1. The story hinges on a gold ring shaped like a serpent with emerald eyes. Comment on the responses that this image evokes in the reader.

Ans. The serpent ring is one of the most resonant images in the story. In mythology and literature, the serpent carries layered symbolism — it represents wisdom, mystery, temptation, and the cyclical nature of time (as in the ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail). A ring shaped like a serpent, therefore, combines the idea of eternal recurrence with that of hidden knowledge. The emerald eyes add an almost alive, watchful quality to the object, as if it is always looking, always knowing.

For the reader, the ring functions as the story's mysterious thread. It is what links the dead woman in Havana to the enigmatic Frau Frieda of Vienna — not a name, not a face, but this singular piece of jewellery. It first appears on a corpse embedded in a hotel wall after a freak wave, then it reappears in the memory of a crowded Viennese tavern thirty-four years earlier, and later on a stout old woman in a Barcelona restaurant. The ring bridges time and space, life and death, past and present. It gives the story its haunting, circular quality.

Q2. The craft of a master story-teller lies in the ability to interweave imagination and reality. Do you think that this story illustrates this?

Ans. Yes, this story is a masterclass in the technique that García Márquez made famous: magical realism. The story opens with a perfectly realistic, newspaper-like account of a freakish wave hitting the Havana Riviera Hotel — a grounded, factual tone. Yet within this realistic frame, the central mystery is entirely magical: can a woman truly sell her dreams as prophecies? Can a coincidental dream shared by a poet and a dream-seller be more than chance?

García Márquez never forces the reader to choose between the magical and the rational. He presents both with equal weight. The Portuguese ambassador's final words — 'She dreamed' — delivered with 'a certain disenchantment,' is both a mundane fact and an extraordinary one. A woman who does nothing but dream, and yet acquires an entire fortune through it: is this magic or shrewd psychology? The story refuses to answer. Real events (the Havana wave, the encounter with Neruda, the Barcelona lunch) are woven seamlessly with the fantastical (Frau Frieda's prophetic authority, the shared dream). This interweaving is precisely what gives the story its uncanny, lingering power.

Q3. Bring out the contradiction in the last exchange between the author and the Portuguese ambassador.

Ans. The exchange is: 'In concrete terms,' I asked at last, 'what did she do?' 'Nothing,' he said, with a certain disenchantment. 'She dreamed.'

The contradiction is beautifully compressed. The author asks for something 'concrete' — a practical, verifiable, real-world activity. The ambassador's answer is 'nothing,' which in ordinary terms means she was unproductive. And yet the explanation that follows — 'She dreamed' — is offered with the tone of someone describing an extraordinary vocation. The ambassador's disenchantment suggests he expected more too, but he cannot deny that dreaming was her entire occupation.

The irony is that 'nothing' in this context was everything. Frau Frieda acquired fortune, security, and authority purely through dreams. She crossed continents, outlived patrons, built a life in Portugal — all by selling something intangible. The 'nothing' she did was, in effect, the most powerful thing in the story. The contradiction between the emptiness of the word 'nothing' and the richness of what she accomplished is the story's final, perfectly placed punch.

Q4. Comment on the ironical element in the story.

Ans. Irony operates on several levels in this story. The most obvious is situational: a woman who 'does nothing' — only dreams — manages to accumulate an entire fortune and live a life of security and comfort, while educated, hard-working people struggle. Her dreams, which cannot be verified, proved more economically rewarding than most practical professions.

There is also dramatic irony: Neruda, the great poet who declares 'only poetry is clairvoyant' and dismisses Frau Frieda's powers, ends up dreaming about her — and the dream precisely mirrors hers. His sceptical superiority is quietly undermined by the very coincidence he would have scoffed at. Furthermore, the author who calls her dreams 'a stratagem for surviving' is himself unable to return to Vienna for decades because of one of those very dreams. His rational rejection of superstition coexists with his deeply irrational obedience to it. The story is, in this way, an ironic meditation on the gap between what we believe and what we do.

Language Work

A. Vocabulary — Phrases under 'dream' and 'sell'

Phrases under 'dream':

- dream on — used to tell someone that what they are hoping for is unlikely to happen; e.g., 'You think you'll finish in an hour? Dream on.'
- dream something away — to spend time idly imagining things instead of doing them; e.g., 'She dreamed the afternoon away by the window.'
- (not) dream of doing something — to be completely unwilling to do something, or to consider it unthinkable; e.g., 'I wouldn't dream of missing your wedding.'
- dream something up — to invent or think of an unusual or unlikely idea; e.g., 'Who dreamed up this bizarre plan?'
- look like a dream — to appear wonderfully attractive or perfect; e.g., 'She looked like a dream in that gown.'

Phrases under 'sell':

- sell-by date — the date printed on food products beyond which they should not be sold; figuratively, past one's prime.
- selling-point — a feature or quality that makes something attractive to buyers; a key advantage.
- sell-out — an event for which all tickets are sold; also, informally, someone who betrays their principles for personal gain.
- selling price — the price at which something is sold to a buyer.

- seller's market — a market in which goods are scarce and sellers have the advantage, as buyers are competing.

B. Grammar: Emphasis — Task

The task asks students to underline the part that receives the most emphasis in each sentence. The most emphatic position is at the end of a sentence; the next most emphatic is the beginning; the middle is the least emphatic. Here are the analyses:

Sentence 1:

'I never saw her again or even wondered about her until I heard about the snake ring on the woman who died in the Havana Riviera disaster.'

Emphatic part: 'the woman who died in the Havana Riviera disaster.' The sentence builds through a denial ('never saw... or even wondered') toward this climactic revelation at the end — the death and the snake ring — which is the crux of the story.

Sentence 2:

'That did not surprise me, however, because I had always thought her dreams were no more than a stratagem for surviving.'

Emphatic part: 'a stratagem for surviving.' The entire sentence leads to this conclusion — the author's rationalist interpretation of Frau Frieda's gifts, placed emphatically at the end.

Sentence 3:

'Although she did not say so, her conversation made it clear that, dream by dream, she had taken over the entire fortune of her ineffable patrons in Vienna.'

Emphatic part: 'the entire fortune of her ineffable patrons in Vienna.' The qualifying clause at the start and the repeated phrase 'dream by dream' build toward this emphatic revelation of her extraordinary achievement.

Sentence 4:

'Three tables away sat an intrepid woman in an old-fashioned felt hat and a purple scarf, eating without haste and staring at him.'

Emphatic part: 'staring at him.' The sentence begins with her location and builds through her description, arriving at the action — her pointed, unrelenting stare — which is the most significant detail.

Sentence 5:

'I stayed in Vienna for more than a month, sharing the straitened circumstances of the other students while I waited for money that never arrived.'

Emphatic part: 'money that never arrived.' The end of the sentence delivers the key fact — the non-arrival of money — which explains the narrator's prolonged stay and the significance of Frau Frieda's generous visits to the tavern.

C. Pronunciation — Syllable Task

A syllable is the basic unit of pronunciation, each containing a vowel sound. Below are five examples of two-syllable, three-syllable, and four-syllable words drawn from the lesson:

Two-syllable words:

hotel (ho-tel), beacon (bea-con), morning (mor-ning), tavern (tav-ern), serpent (ser-pent)

Three-syllable words:

discover (dis-cov-er), emerald (em-er-ald), remember (re-mem-ber), accident (ac-ci-dent), beautiful (beau-ti-ful)

Four-syllable words:

extraordinary (ex-tra-or-di-na-ry — 6 syllables; acceptable 4-syllable alternative: inevitably — in-ev-it-ab-ly), interpreter (in-ter-pret-er), immediately (im-med-iate-ly), conversation (con-ver-sa-tion), acceleration (ac-cel-er-a-tion)

Note: Students are encouraged to pick words directly from the chapter text and count syllables by clapping or tapping while speaking each word aloud.

Chapter 2: Eveline

— James Joyce

Stop and Think

Set 1 (Page 15)

Q1. Why did Eveline review all the familiar objects at home?

Ans. Eveline reviewed the familiar objects around her because she was on the verge of leaving her home forever. Sitting by the window on the evening of her planned departure with Frank, she looked at each object — the dusty cretonne curtains, the broken harmonium, the yellowing photograph of the priest — as if trying to imprint them on her memory, knowing she might never see them again. There is both tenderness and ambivalence in this act: these objects represent the drudgery and confinement of her life, yet they are also the only world she has ever known. The review is Joyce's way of showing us Eveline's inner conflict — her mind clinging to the familiar even as her plans demand she leave it behind.

Q2. Where was Eveline planning to go?

Ans. Eveline was planning to leave Dublin and sail to Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a sailor named Frank. She intended to marry him and start a new life there, where Frank already had a home waiting for her. They were to leave by the night boat from the North Wall station. For Eveline, Buenos Aires represented escape from her oppressive home life — from her violent and demanding father, her grinding domestic responsibilities, and the joyless routine of her job at the Stores.

Set 2 (Page 20)

Q1. Who was Frank? Why did Eveline's father quarrel with him?

Ans. Frank was a sailor and Eveline's lover. He was kind, manly, and open-hearted — a man of the world who had sailed through the Straits of Magellan, worked on ships of the Allan Line, and eventually settled in Buenos Aires. He was lodging on the main road near Eveline's home when they first met. He would wait for her outside the Stores every evening and walk her home, took her to see *The Bohemian Girl* at the theatre, and spoke of distant lands that fired her imagination. He called her affectionately by the pet name 'Poppens.'

Eveline's father quarrelled with Frank and eventually forbade Eveline from having anything to do with him. His reason, delivered dismissively, was: 'I know these sailor chaps' — a suggestion that men who sail are unreliable or morally suspect. The father's hostility may also have been fuelled by jealousy or by his general desire to keep Eveline trapped at home, serving him. After the quarrel, Eveline had to meet Frank in secret.

Q2. What significance does Eveline find in the organ-player's appearance on the day she had decided to leave?

Ans. The distant sound of the street organ playing a familiar air strikes Eveline as deeply significant — even fateful. She recognises the melody and notes, with a sense of eerie coincidence, that of all evenings, this particular air should come drifting down the avenue on the very night she has chosen to leave. The music immediately triggers the memory of her mother's death: she recalls lying in the close dark room across the hall on the last night of her mother's illness, hearing a melancholy Italian air playing outside, and her father chasing the organ-player away.

For Eveline, the return of this music feels like a supernatural reminder of the promise she made to her dying mother — to 'keep the home together as long as she could.' The organ-player's music

thus becomes a kind of omen or summons from the past, pulling her back from the precipice of departure. It reinforces her paralysis, making her feel that leaving would be a betrayal of her deepest filial duty.

Understanding the Text

Q1. Name the two characters in this story whom Eveline liked and loved, and two she did not. What were the reasons for her feelings towards them?

Ans. Characters Eveline liked and loved:

Ernest — her brother and favourite sibling. He was the eldest and most grown-up; he never joined the children's games in the field, but Eveline had a particular fondness for him. His death left a void in her life.

Frank — her sailor lover. Eveline genuinely liked and perhaps loved Frank. He was kind, worldly, entertaining, and attentive. He introduced her to the theatre and the idea of a wider world. He represented hope, love, and escape from her trapped existence.

Characters Eveline did not like (or had complicated, largely negative feelings towards):

Her father — Eveline feared rather than loved him. He was violent, controlling, and abusive. He threatened her, quarrelled with Frank without reason, and kept her wages while accusing her of squandering money. He treated her as a domestic servant. Though she acknowledged occasional moments of gentleness — reading her a ghost story, wearing her mother's bonnet to make the children laugh — these could not outweigh his cruelty.

Miss Gavan — her supervisor at the Stores. Miss Gavan was sharp-tongued and consistently condescending toward Eveline in front of customers, humiliating her with remarks like 'Miss Hill, don't you see these ladies are waiting?' and 'Look lively, Miss Hill, please.' Eveline felt no warmth toward her and would not miss her.

Q2. Describe the conflict of emotions felt by Eveline on the day she had decided to elope with Frank.

Ans. Eveline's emotional state on this day is a battlefield of contradictions. On one side are the reasons to leave: the desire to escape her father's violence and threats, the grinding drudgery of housework and her underpaid job, the prospect of marriage, respect, and a new life with Frank in Buenos Aires. She tells herself she has 'a right to happiness' and that Frank will 'save her.'

On the other side are the forces pulling her back: her deep attachment to the familiar objects of her home, her sense of duty to her ageing father (who will miss her, who occasionally showed tenderness), her memory of her dead mother and the deathbed promise she made to keep the home together, and her terror of the unknown — the dark sea, the strange country, the uncertain future. As the departure hour approaches, these forces overwhelm her. At the station, the boat's mournful whistle, the crowd, and the weight of her guilt paralyse her completely. She cannot move forward, cannot speak, cannot respond to Frank's call. Her paralysis is total — emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Q3. Why do you think Eveline let go of the opportunity to escape?

Ans. Eveline's failure to board the boat is one of the most studied moments of paralysis in modern literature. Several forces converge to prevent her escape. The most immediate is her terror — a sudden, irrational panic overtakes her at the station. The boat's whistle sounds mournful, the sea feels threatening ('All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart'), and Frank's urging to 'Come!' sounds to her like drowning rather than salvation.

Deeper than fear, however, is the weight of duty and conditioning. Her dead mother's voice — crying 'Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!' (the end of pleasure is pain) — has imprinted itself on her soul. Her promise to keep the home together, her Catholic sense of filial obligation, and nineteen years of obedience to her father have made self-assertion feel like sin. Leaving is not just difficult for Eveline — it feels morally impermissible. She prays to God to show her her 'duty,' and duty, in the world she inhabits, means staying. In the end, she cannot break free — not because she does not want to, but because she does not know how to be anything other than what she has always been.

Q4. What are the signs of Eveline's indecision that we see as the hour of her departure with Frank neared?

Ans. Joyce gives us many signs of Eveline's deepening indecision as the story progresses:

She continues to sit at the window long after her time is running out, instead of preparing to leave. She allows herself to be drawn into memory — of her mother, her father's rare moments of tenderness, the family picnic on the Hill of Howth — which softens her resolve. She has written farewell letters to Harry and her father but holds them in her lap, growing 'indistinct' in the fading light, as if she cannot quite bring herself to finalise even this symbolic act of departure. At the station, she answers nothing when Frank speaks to her about the passage. She prays to God to show her her duty — suggesting she has not made peace with her decision. She grips the iron railing with both hands when Frank calls, physically refusing to cross the threshold. Finally, her face turns white and passive, 'like a helpless animal' — all expression and volition drained from her. These accumulating signs trace a quiet but devastating collapse of will.

Talking about the Text

Q1. Deciding between filial duty and the right to personal happiness is problematic. Discuss.

Ans. Eveline's story dramatises one of the most ancient and universal human dilemmas: the conflict between what we owe to others — especially our parents and family — and what we owe to ourselves. Filial duty is not a trivial obligation; it is rooted in love, gratitude, and the recognition that we did not come into the world alone. For Eveline, her mother's sacrifice and her deathbed plea make the duty feel sacred and binding.

Yet the story also shows us what happens when duty becomes a cage. Eveline's father is not merely a figure deserving of care; he is abusive and manipulative. Her 'duty' to him is not a moral obligation freely given — it is the product of years of fear and conditioning. The right to personal happiness — to love, freedom, and self-determination — is equally legitimate. The tragedy of Eveline is that she cannot reconcile the two claims. She has no language, no framework, and no inner strength to say: 'I can honour the memory of my mother and still choose my own life.'

This dilemma is not unique to Eveline or to early twentieth-century Dublin. Across cultures and generations, young people — especially young women — have been asked to sacrifice their futures in the name of family duty. The story does not resolve the tension; it simply shows us its cost with devastating clarity.

Q2. Share with your partner any instance of your personal experience where you, or somebody you know, had to make a difficult choice.

Ans. (This question invites personal reflection and discussion. The following is a model response to guide students.) A difficult choice often arises when two equally important values — love for family and love for oneself — pull in opposite directions. For example, a student who has worked hard to earn admission to a prestigious university in another city may face a parent's earnest plea to stay close to home and support the family. The student must weigh their ambition and future against their love and responsibility. Like Eveline, they may find that the emotional weight of family expectation makes even a rational, beneficial choice feel like betrayal. What distinguishes those

who move forward from those who stay paralysed is often not the absence of guilt, but the courage to accept it and act anyway.

Appreciation

Q1. The description in this story has symbolic touches. What do you think the 'window', the 'gathering dusk', the 'dusty cretonne and its odour' symbolise?

Ans. The Window: Eveline sits at the window throughout the first half of the story. The window is a threshold symbol — it separates the inside (her home, her past, her imprisonment) from the outside (the avenue, the world, possibility). She can see out but does not step out. It represents her state of mind perfectly: she is perpetually on the verge of leaving but never actually crossing over. The window also frames her passivity — she watches the world rather than participating in it.

The Gathering Dusk: The story is set in the evening, and the light steadily fades as it progresses. Dusk is the time between day and night — a liminal, transitional moment that mirrors Eveline's own between-state: between her old life and her new one, between staying and going, between childhood and adulthood. As the dusk deepens, so does her indecision. The gathering darkness also suggests the closing in of her options and the approaching end of her last chance.

The Dusty Cretonne and Its Odour: The dusty curtains are the very first sensory detail Joyce gives us — Eveline smells them before anything else. Dust suggests age, stagnation, and neglect; a life that has not been aired or renewed. The persistent odour of this dust clings to Eveline even at the station, in her final moment of decision. It is the smell of her past, her home, her imprisonment — and it follows her like a ghost, making escape feel impossible. The cretonne is both the physical fabric of the curtains and a metaphor for the fabric of her entrapment.

Q2. Note how the narrative proceeds through the consciousness of Eveline.

Ans. Joyce's narrative technique in 'Eveline' is a pioneering example of what he would later develop into full stream of consciousness in *Ulysses*. The story has no traditional plot in the sense of external dramatic action — almost nothing 'happens.' Instead, the narrative moves entirely through Eveline's mind as she sits at the window. We experience her world through her perceptions, memories, fears, and hopes without any omniscient narrator intervening to explain or judge.

Time in the story is not linear: the present moment (sitting at the window, holding the letters) constantly dissolves into the past (childhood games, her mother's death, her first meeting with Frank) and then back to the present. This fluid movement between past and present mirrors the way the mind actually works — associative, layered, non-sequential. Joyce gives us no definitive statement about what Eveline should do or why she fails; we are inside her consciousness and must arrive at our own understanding. This technique makes the story feel intimate, psychologically truthful, and deeply modern.

Q3. In the last section of the story, notice these expressions — (i) A bell clanged upon her heart. (ii) All the seas of the world tumbled upon her heart. (iii) Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. (iv) She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. What are the emotions that these images evoke?

Ans. (i) 'A bell clanged upon her heart' — This image evokes sudden, violent alarm. A clanging bell is a warning signal, associated with danger or emergency. The fact that it 'clangs upon her heart' rather than merely in her ears makes the sensation visceral and inward — it is not an external sound but an internal jolt of terror. The image suggests a sudden panic, a primal alarm that overrides all rational thought.

(ii) 'All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart' — This is an image of overwhelming, engulfing chaos. The seas are infinite and merciless; they do not merely lap but 'tumble,'

suggesting violence and disorder. The image captures Eveline's sensation of being swamped — by emotion, by fear, by the enormity of the choice before her. Frank, who is literally about to take her across the sea, is reimagined here as a drowning force rather than a saving one. The image evokes existential terror.

(iii) 'Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy' — The iron railing is the last physical barrier between Eveline and the boat. Her frenzied clutching of it is a desperate act of self-anchoring — she is holding on to the familiar world with all her physical strength. The word 'frenzy' suggests she is no longer in rational control; her body is acting out what her mind has not consciously decided. The image evokes desperation, panic, and the instinctive refusal to let go.

(iv) 'She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal' — This final image is perhaps the most devastating in the story. The whiteness of her face suggests all colour, all life, all emotion has drained away. She is passive — not calm, but emptied. The simile 'like a helpless animal' strips her of human agency entirely. A helpless animal does not choose; it simply cannot move. 'Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition' — she has become, in this moment, a creature of pure paralysis. The image evokes pity, tragedy, and the terrible cost of a life that has been so thoroughly conditioned into submission.

Q4. Do you think the author indicates his judgement of Eveline in the story?

Ans. Joyce famously described his Dubliners stories as a 'chapter of the moral history of my country,' and the theme of paralysis — spiritual, emotional, and social — runs through all of them. In Eveline, he presents the character's failure to escape with great compassion but also with unmistakable intent. The final image — Eveline's white, passive face giving no sign of love or recognition — is not neutral. It is a portrait of annihilation.

Yet Joyce does not explicitly condemn Eveline. He does not say she is wrong or cowardly. The narrative stays inside her consciousness without editorial comment, letting the reader feel what it is like to be her. This neutrality is itself a kind of judgement: by showing us the forces — poverty, patriarchy, Catholic guilt, the weight of a deathbed promise — that have produced Eveline's paralysis, Joyce implies that she is not so much a moral failure as a social victim. His judgement, if we can call it that, is directed not at Eveline personally but at the entire system of Dublin life that has made her this way. The title of the collection — Dubliners — and its sustained portrait of spiritual paralysis suggest that Eveline is not exceptional; she is representative.

Language Work

A. Grammar: Parallelism — Task

In each sentence below, the parallel elements (equal grammatical structures expressing equal or related ideas) are identified:

Sentence 1:

'She had consented to go away, to leave her home.'

Parallel elements: 'to go away' | | 'to leave her home' — both are infinitive phrases expressing her decision. The parallelism reinforces that these two actions are equivalent in her mind: departing and leaving home are the same devastating act.

Sentence 2:

'Strange that it should come that very night to remind her of the promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together as long as she could.'

Parallel elements: 'the promise to her mother' || 'her promise to keep the home together' — the second phrase is a restatement and expansion of the first. The repetition of 'promise' reinforces how binding and inescapable this obligation feels to Eveline.

Sentence 3:

'She prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty.'

Parallel elements: 'to direct her' || 'to show her what was her duty' — both are infinitive phrases expressing what she asks of God. The parallelism shows that for Eveline, guidance and the revelation of duty are the same thing — she does not ask for happiness or freedom, only direction.

Sentence 4:

'Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms.'

Parallel elements: 'take her in his arms' || 'fold her in his arms' — both are verb phrases with nearly identical structure. The near-repetition creates a dreamlike, wishful quality — Eveline is not reasoning but fantasising, repeating the image compulsively as a form of self-reassurance.

Sentence 5:

'Her time was running out but she continued to sit by the window, leaning her head against the window curtain, inhaling the odour of dusty cretonne.'

Parallel elements: 'leaning her head against the window curtain' || 'inhaling the odour of dusty cretonne' — both are present participial phrases describing Eveline's physical posture and sensory experience. The parallelism enacts her passive absorption in the familiar, even as time runs out.

Sentence 6:

'Not long before, when she had been laid up for a day, he had read her out a ghost story and made toast for her at the fire.'

Parallel elements: 'read her out a ghost story' || 'made toast for her at the fire' — both are verb phrases describing the father's acts of kindness. The parallelism, though modest, is significant: it presents these two small gestures as equivalent acts of care, creating a rare, tender image of the father that complicates Eveline's — and our — feelings about leaving him.

B. Pronunciation — Stressed Syllables

Mark the stressed syllable (shown in CAPITALS below):

photograph — PHO-to-graph (stress on first syllable)

escape — es-CAPE (stress on second syllable)

changes — CHAN-ges (stress on first syllable)

threaten — THREA-ten (stress on first syllable)

excitement — ex-CITE-ment (stress on second syllable)

farewell — fare-WELL (stress on second syllable)

illuminated — il-LU-mined (stress on second syllable)

sailor — SAI-lor (stress on first syllable)

sacrifice — SAC-ri-fice (stress on first syllable)

invariable — in-VA-ri-a-ble (stress on second syllable)

— *End of Chapter 2: Eveline* —

Chapter 3: A Wedding in Brownsville

— Isaac Bashevis Singer

Stop and Think

Set 1 (Page 25)

Q1. Who were the Senciminers?

Ans. The Senciminers were Jewish immigrants to America who originally came from the town of Sencimin in Poland. Before the Holocaust, Sencimin had a thriving Jewish community, and many of its residents had emigrated to the United States in search of a better life. In New York, they had formed a tight-knit community — the Senciminer Society — holding regular meetings, parties, and social events to maintain their cultural bonds. By the time of the story, however, the town of Sencimin itself had been obliterated by the Nazis during World War II. Most of the Jewish population who had remained there had been tortured, burned, or gassed. The Senciminers at the wedding were therefore not merely a social group — they were survivors and relatives of victims, carrying the weight of collective trauma even as they celebrated.

Q2. Why did Dr Margolin not particularly want his wife to accompany him to the wedding?

Ans. Dr Margolin did not want Gretl at the wedding primarily because he felt embarrassed by the state of American Jewish culture, and he did not wish to have to make apologies to her for what she would witness. He found the weddings of his community distasteful — the distorted Jewish customs, men wearing skullcaps with no genuine religious feeling, rabbis and cantors imitating Christian ministers, the ear-splitting music, the Anglicised Yiddish and Yiddishised English. He felt ashamed whenever he took Gretl, a German-born Christian, to such events, because even she could see that 'American Judaism was a mess.' By attending alone, he could at least spare himself the humiliation of explaining or apologising. There was also a more personal reason: the wedding would dredge up memories of Sencimin, of his lost family, and of Raizel — his great unrequited love — and he may have instinctively felt that this was not a world he wished to share with his wife.

Set 2 (Page 29)

Q1. What is the Hippocratic Oath?

Ans. The Hippocratic Oath is an ancient ethical code attributed to the Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460–370 BCE), considered the father of Western medicine. It is traditionally taken by doctors upon beginning their medical practice and commits them to a set of ethical principles: to do no harm to patients, to maintain patient confidentiality, to treat the sick to the best of one's ability, to practise medicine with integrity, and to never exploit the doctor-patient relationship. The oath symbolises the moral foundation of the medical profession. In the story, Singer uses it to indicate that despite his internal cynicism and sense of failure, Dr Margolin upholds professional honour — he has never broken the oath, treats rabbis, refugees, and writers without charge, and refuses associations that smack of careerism.

Q2. What topic does the merry banter at the wedding invariably lead to?

Ans. Despite the festive setting — the music, dancing, food, and laughter — every conversation at the wedding inevitably returns to death, loss, and the Holocaust. The cheerful greetings and reminiscences constantly veer into accounts of murder and extermination: 'My father? He was killed. They were all killed.' 'Sorele? Shot. Together with her children.' 'Abraham Zilberstein? They burned him in the synagogue with twenty others.' 'Your brother Chayim? Your Uncle Oyzer? They killed everyone, everyone.' Even in the midst of celebration, the guests cannot avoid confronting the void left by the Nazi genocide. One guest summarises it with bitter eloquence: 'All of us are

really dead, if you want to call it that. We were exterminated, wiped out. Even the survivors carry death in their hearts. But it's a wedding, we should be cheerful.' This grim undercurrent transforms the wedding into something far more complex than a celebration — it becomes a memorial, a gathering of ghosts.

Set 3 (Page 34)

Q1. Who was the woman that Dr Margolin suddenly encountered at the wedding?

Ans. The woman Dr Margolin encountered was Raizel, the daughter of Melekh the watchmaker from Sencimin — the great love of his life. As a young man in Sencimin, Margolin had been deeply in love with Raizel, but she had married someone else. He had later received reports that she had been shot by the Nazis, and he had accepted this as fact. Seeing her at the wedding therefore strikes him as extraordinary and inexplicable. She is young-looking, with familiar dark eyes, girlish braids, and dimples — exactly as he remembered her. Whether she is truly Raizel, a ghost, an astral projection, or a figment of Margolin's intoxicated or dying mind is deliberately left ambiguous by Singer.

Q2. What were the events that led to his confused state of mind?

Ans. Several factors combine to produce Margolin's deeply confused mental state. First, on the way to the wedding, he witnesses a gruesome traffic accident on Eastern Parkway in which a man on a stretcher — 'a chalky pallor, one eye closed, the other partly open and glazed' — looks strangely familiar. This plants the unsettling suspicion that he himself may have been a victim of the accident. Second, at the wedding, he is overwhelmed by the chaotic sensory experience — the noise, the crowd, the odours, the endless parade of faces, and the relentless litany of deaths. He feels intoxicated without having drunk. Third, his wallet goes missing, which disorients him further. Finally, the appearance of Raizel — who was supposed to be dead — shatters his rational grip on reality. He begins to wonder whether the lively wedding or his intimate encounter with Raizel is the illusion, and whether he himself died in the accident and is now a spirit 'hovering in the World of Twilight.'

Understanding the Text

Q1. What do you understand of Dr Margolin's past? How does it affect his present life?

Ans. Dr Solomon Margolin's past is layered with both promise and disappointment. In Sencimin, Poland, he was a celebrated prodigy — a child who could recite entire passages of the Talmud from memory and who taught himself algebra, geometry, and languages. As a teenager he was already engaging with Maimonides, Spinoza, and Jewish mystical texts. Everyone expected him to become a genius. However, he dissipated his talents by constantly changing fields and wandering from country to country. He never fulfilled the extraordinary intellectual promise of his youth.

His personal life was equally marked by loss. His great love, Raizel, married another man. Later, she and virtually his entire family in Sencimin were killed by the Nazis. The Holocaust annihilated not just his family but his faith in humanity itself — 'had rooted out his last hope for better days.' Hitler's carnage destroyed whatever religious or philosophical consolation he might have found.

In the present, Margolin is outwardly successful — a respected doctor with wealthy patients, a nice apartment on West End Avenue, and a solid reputation in New York's Jewish community. But inwardly, he feels like a failure. He is haunted by existential questions about mortality, the soul, and the purpose of life. He is contemptuous of the petty complaints of his wealthy patients while millions were being murdered. His marriage to Gretl, though stable, lacks passion. His past — the lost genius, the murdered family, the unfulfilled love — casts a long shadow over everything he does and feels.

Q2. What was Dr Margolin's attitude towards his profession?

Ans. Dr Margolin's attitude towards his profession was one of honour mixed with growing disillusionment. On the positive side, he was scrupulously ethical. He had never broken the Hippocratic Oath, treated patients with absolute integrity, supplied medicines and hospital beds to rabbis, refugees, and writers free of charge, and refused professional associations that smacked of careerism. His colleagues respected him and he was seen as an important figure. Gretl considered his sense of professional honour almost a mania.

However, at a deeper level, medicine had ceased to provide him with meaning. He had begun to despise the wealthy matrons who came to him with their petty ailments while millions were being systematically murdered across the world. The contrast between the trivial and the catastrophic had made his daily work feel hollow. He practised medicine dutifully, but without the sense of purpose and wonder that once might have animated it.

Q3. What is Dr Margolin's view of the kind of life the American Jewish community leads?

Ans. Dr Margolin is deeply critical of American Jewish life. He finds it culturally diluted, spiritually hollow, and socially pretentious. At Jewish weddings and Bar Mitzvahs, he is embarrassed by the distorted customs: men who have no real religious feeling wearing skullcaps as a social performance, rabbis and cantors imitating Christian ministers rather than maintaining authentic Jewish traditions. The language itself has become corrupted — a jarring mix of Anglicised Yiddish and Yiddishised English. The music is a 'hodge-podge of American jazz with Oriental flourishes.'

He sees the community as people who have traded spiritual depth for material comfort and social conformity. He is also critical of the immigrant obsession with wealth and status — at the wedding, a horse-and-buggy driver who became a millionaire arrives with a new, diamond-laden wife, having replaced his murdered first family with conspicuous prosperity. Margolin finds it all spiritually bankrupt, though he himself is too honest and too plagued by his own sense of failure to feel genuinely superior to any of them.

Q4. What were the personality traits that endeared Dr Margolin to others in his community?

Ans. Despite his inner cynicism and sense of alienation, Dr Margolin possessed qualities that earned him genuine warmth and respect within his community. He was generous: he treated the poor — rabbis, refugees, Jewish writers — without charge, providing medicines and hospital beds out of a sense of duty rather than profit. He was professionally honourable: he never exploited patients, avoided careerism, and lived by the Hippocratic Oath. He was also physically distinguished — tall, handsome, with a European bearing — and the community took pride in him as one of their own who had 'made it.'

At the wedding, people are genuinely delighted to see him, rushing to embrace him, calling him by his childhood name 'Schloime-Dovid,' recalling with warmth the prodigy he had been. He is remembered as the little boy with blond side-curls who could recite a tractate of the Talmud by heart. This collective memory of him is one of pride and affection. His rootedness in the community's shared history — despite his years of distance and his professorial airs — makes him beloved even when he grows aloof.

Q5. Why do you think Dr Margolin had the curious experience at the wedding hall?

Ans. Singer deliberately leaves the explanation ambiguous, and this ambiguity is central to the story's power. Several interpretations are possible. The most supernatural reading is that Margolin died in the traffic accident on Eastern Parkway and his astral body — in a state of semi-consciousness between life and death — wandered into the wedding hall, where he encountered the ghost of Raizel (who was shot by the Nazis). In this reading, both are spirits who have not yet accepted their deaths, and their meeting is a tender reunion in the afterlife.

The more rational reading is that Margolin is alive but heavily intoxicated by the atmosphere of the wedding — the sensory overload, the emotional weight of so many deaths, the rekindled grief for Raizel — and experienced a hallucination or psychotic episode, perhaps triggered by the traffic accident he witnessed. The missing wallet could be explained by a pickpocket at the crowded hall.

A third reading is that the woman he met was not Raizel at all but perhaps a relative — a daughter or niece — whom he mistook for her in his confused state. Singer does not resolve this. The story's genius lies precisely in maintaining all three possibilities simultaneously, making the experience feel simultaneously like grief, ghost story, and psychological breakdown.

Q6. Was the encounter with Raizel an illusion or was the carousing at the wedding-hall illusory? Was Dr Margolin the victim of the accident and was his astral body hovering in the world of twilight?

Ans. Singer structures the story so that we cannot definitively answer this question — and that unresolvability is the point. The story deliberately blurs the boundary between the real and the supernatural, between the living and the dead, between the festive and the spectral.

Evidence that the wedding was real and the Raizel encounter was illusory: Raizel was confirmed dead by multiple sources; the woman may have been a younger relative he mistook for her in his drunken, overwrought state; and he acknowledges himself that 'I must have had too much to drink.'

Evidence that Margolin died in the accident: The man on the stretcher looked 'strangely familiar'; Margolin finds no trace of pulse or breathing when he examines himself; he feels 'oddly deflated as if some physical dimension were missing'; and the concept of the 'World of Twilight' and the 'Astral Body' is explicitly introduced. Furthermore, at the very end, when he whispers 'What's the difference? As long as we're together,' Raizel replies 'I've been waiting for that all these years' — a line that makes no sense if she is a living woman at a New York wedding but makes perfect sense if both are ghosts.

The most resonant interpretation is the supernatural one: both Margolin and Raizel are dead, and their reunion in the wedding hall is the story's profound act of grace — a love restored in death that was denied in life. Singer, rooted in Jewish mystical tradition, invites us to take this possibility seriously without insisting on it.

Talking about the Text

Q1. Fiction often deals with human consciousness, rather than with the reality of existence.

Ans. This story is a powerful illustration of how fiction, at its deepest, maps the landscape of human consciousness — the inner world of memory, guilt, desire, existential fear, and longing — rather than merely recording external events. Very little 'happens' in this story in the conventional sense: a doctor goes to a wedding. Yet the story is extraordinarily rich because Singer takes us deep inside Margolin's consciousness: his self-assessments as a failure, his contempt for his community's shallowness, his unextinguished love for Raizel, his philosophical wrestling with God and death, and his hallucinatory experience at the wedding.

The reality of the wedding hall — its noise, its people, its dancing — is filtered entirely through Margolin's perception, and his perception is itself unreliable, shaped by grief, alcohol, and possibly death. Singer shows us that what we call 'reality' is always mediated through consciousness, and that consciousness — especially one burdened by the Holocaust, by lost love, and by unresolved existential questions — transforms even the most ordinary event into something mythic and strange. In this sense, the story argues that human consciousness is not merely the vehicle through which we experience reality; it IS reality.

Q2. The ways in which survivors of holocausts deal with life.

Ans. The wedding in Brownsville is a microcosm of how Holocaust survivors navigate the impossible task of living after catastrophic loss. Singer captures several coping strategies simultaneously. Some survivors, like the horse-and-buggy driver turned millionaire, bury their grief under the pursuit of material success — a new wife, diamonds, a display of prosperity that declares: 'I am alive and I have won.' Others carry the dead into every conversation, unable to let the names and fates of the murdered rest — every reunion becomes an automatic recitation of who was shot, who was burned, who was gassed.

Still others, like Dr Margolin, retreat into professional excellence and civic responsibility as a way of making meaning, while privately feeling hollowed out. The wedding itself — a celebration of new life and continuity — is perhaps the most defiant act of all: holding a wedding, making music, dancing, eating, toasting 'Lechayim' (to life), even as they know that most of those they grew up with are ash. One guest articulates it with painful clarity: 'What is life anyway? A dance on the grave.' Yet they dance. Singer presents this not as denial but as the most human of responses — the insistence on continuing, on celebrating, on finding moments of joy even in the shadow of annihilation.

Appreciation

Q1. Do you think this story could be loosely classified as surrealistic? What elements in this story would support the idea?

Ans. Yes, 'A Wedding in Brownsville' can be loosely but meaningfully classified as surrealistic, particularly in its latter sections. Surrealism, as an artistic movement, prized the irrational, the dreamlike, and the unconscious over the logical and the conventionally real. It sought a 'higher reality' in which the boundaries between waking and dreaming, the living and the dead, the past and the present, dissolve.

Several elements of this story align with surrealist aesthetics. The taxi ride through New York takes on an otherworldly quality: the sky 'sagged low, heavy, red as glowing metal'; the people on the sidewalks look 'unearthly, as if being punished for sins committed in another incarnation.' This is the language of a dream, not a realistic description. The wedding hall itself, with its overwhelming mingling of celebration and death-talk, functions as a kind of liminal space — neither fully this world nor the next. The appearance of Raizel, who was supposed to be dead, is the central surrealist event: the impossible made present, the boundary between the living and the dead made permeable.

Margolin's own uncertainty about whether he is alive or dead — checking himself for a pulse, feeling 'deflated as if some physical dimension were missing' — mirrors the surrealist preoccupation with states of consciousness that resist rational categorisation. The story's refusal to resolve its central ambiguity is itself a surrealist gesture: reality is not a fixed, verifiable thing but a fluid, subjective experience shaped by the unconscious mind.

Q2. Comment on the technique used by the author to convey the gruesome realities of the war and its devastating effect on the psyche of human beings through an intense personal experience.

Ans. Singer's technique is masterly precisely because he never dwells on the Holocaust directly. He does not describe camps or killings. Instead, he embeds the horror inside the fabric of a social gathering — a wedding — and allows it to surface through the natural flow of conversation. The technique is one of accumulation and contrast: the joyful surface of the celebration (music, dancing, food, laughter, toasts) is constantly punctuated by casual references to murder that carry the full weight of genocide. 'My father? He was killed. They were all killed.' 'Sorele? Shot. Together with her children.' These sentences arrive without ceremony, embedded between gossip and laughter, which makes them more devastating than any formal elegy would be.

Singer also conveys the psychological damage through Margolin's interiority. His hypochondria, his insomnia, his contempt for trivial complaints, his inability to find faith or peace, his obsessive

existential questioning — all are symptoms of a man permanently wounded by what history did to his people. The Holocaust is not an event in this story; it is a condition of consciousness, a permanent lens through which every experience is filtered.

Finally, the supernatural denouement — the possible death of Margolin and his reunion with Raizel — is Singer's most profound technique. By suggesting that both Margolin and Raizel may already be dead, he implies that the true victims of the Holocaust never really stopped dying; they carry their deaths inside them for the rest of their lives. The wedding becomes both a celebration and a wake, and the boundary between the two ceases to exist.

Language Work

A. Grammar: Sentence Variety — Task

The paragraph to be examined is: 'Some time later the taxi started moving again. Solomon Margolin was now driving through streets he had never seen before...' up to '...Dr Margolin gave the driver a dollar tip and the man took it without uttering a word.'

Analysis of sentence length (approximate word counts):

'Some time later the taxi started moving again.' — 9 words (short, simple sentence — creates abrupt resumption after the accident's shock)

'Solomon Margolin was now driving through streets he had never seen before.' — 13 words (simple sentence with relative clause)

'It was New York, but it might just as well have been Chicago or Cleveland.' — 16 words (compound sentence — contrast reinforces disorientation)

'They passed through an industrial district with factory buildings, warehouses of coal, lumber, scrap iron.' — 15 words (simple sentence with a long noun phrase — creates visual accumulation)

'Negroes, strangely black, stood about on the sidewalks, staring ahead, their great dark eyes full of gloomy hopelessness.' — 18 words (complex participial construction — atmospheric, almost cinematic)

'Occasionally the car would pass a tavern.' — 7 words (short — creates a pause in the description)

'The people at the bar seemed to have something unearthly about them, as if they were being punished here for sins committed in another incarnation.' — 27 words (the longest sentence — complex, with a simile clause — signals the otherworldly tone that prepares for the supernatural ending)

'Just when Solomon Margolin was beginning to suspect that the driver...had gotten lost...the taxi entered a thickly populated neighbourhood.' — approximately 30 words (complex sentence with embedded clauses — mimics the mounting suspense)

'Dr Margolin gave the driver a dollar tip and the man took it without uttering a word.' — 18 words (compound sentence — the driver's silence is given emphasis by being the end of the section)

Observations: The range is from 7 to approximately 30 words, creating rhythmic variety. Short sentences function as punctuation marks, creating pauses or sudden shifts. Longer sentences build atmosphere and psychological depth. The use of participial phrases ('staring ahead, their great dark eyes full of gloomy hopelessness') creates a painterly, impressionistic effect. The overall movement mimics a dream-like drift through an alien landscape, appropriate to Margolin's state of mind as he approaches the wedding — and, possibly, death.

B. Pronunciation — Stress Patterns

Words with primary and secondary stress (pattern similar to 'afternoon' — secondary, unstressed, PRIMARY):

understand — UN-der-STAND (secondary on 'UN', primary on 'STAND')

apprehend — AP-pre-HEND (secondary on 'AP', primary on 'HEND')

rearrange — RE-ar-RANGE (secondary on 'RE', primary on 'RANGE')

refugee — REF-u-GEE (secondary on 'REF', primary on 'GEE')

addressee — AD-dres-SEE (secondary on 'AD', primary on 'SEE')

Primary and secondary stress for words from the lesson:

invitation — in-vi-TAY-tion (primary: TAY; secondary: in)

responsible — re-SPON-si-ble (primary: SPON; secondary: none significant)

seventeen — SEV-en-TEEN (primary: TEEN; secondary: SEV)

American — a-MER-i-can (primary: MER; secondary: none significant)

illustrious — il-LUS-tri-ous (primary: LUS; secondary: none significant)

ambulance — AM-bu-lance (primary: AM; secondary: none significant)

association — as-SO-ci-AY-tion (primary: AY; secondary: SO)

honourable — HON-our-a-ble (primary: HON; secondary: none significant)

permanent — PER-ma-nent (primary: PER; secondary: none significant)

creator — cre-AY-tor (primary: AY; secondary: none significant)

Chapter 4: Tomorrow

— Joseph Conrad

Stop and Think

Set 1 (Page 45)

Q1. What brought Captain Hagberd to Colebrook?

Ans. Captain Hagberd was drawn to Colebrook by a letter — most likely a hoax — that suggested his long-lost son Harry had been seen in or around the town. Harry had run away from home as a young man and had not been heard from for years. When Captain Hagberd received this tip-off (he had been advertising in London papers for years, offering rewards for information), he came to Colebrook in a state of great excitement, dressed in mourning for his recently deceased wife, and began searching the town and surrounding countryside for any trace of his son. He found nothing — not a trace, not a reliable piece of information — but was somehow unable to leave. He eventually sold his old home in Colchester and settled permanently in Colebrook, convinced that Harry would return there. His logic was simple and deluded: if his son had once been drawn to Colebrook, he would be drawn back again.

Q2. Why did the people of Colebrook not have a favourable opinion of Captain Hagberd?

Ans. The people of Colebrook regarded Captain Hagberd as eccentric at best and outright mad at worst. Several things counted against him. He had arrived as a total stranger under morbid circumstances, searching frantically for a son no one knew. He was not a local and had no ties to the community. As time passed, he became increasingly withdrawn and miserly — buying only the cheapest scraps of food after long hesitation, mumbling in shops, discouraging any conversation about his clothing. He chose to dress entirely in sailcloth — a coarse, working canvas material — which caused a sensation in the High Street and became a standing object of ridicule. He spent his days digging and re-digging the front garden of his cottage, never planting anything, waiting for 'tomorrow.' His obsessive talk of his son's imminent return had long since worn out whatever goodwill the town might have had, and he had earned the reputation of being 'an awful skinflint' and a man of settled, harmless but undeniable madness.

Set 2 (Page 48)

Q1. What sort of a seaman had Captain Hagberd been?

Ans. Captain Hagberd had been a coastal seaman — a 'coasting-skipper' who never ventured far from land. One of many children of a bankrupt farmer, he had been apprenticed hurriedly to a coasting trade and spent his entire sea life within sight of the English coast. His longest voyage had lasted only a fortnight, and most of that had been spent at anchor, sheltering from bad weather. He boasted that he had never been 'further than eighty fathoms from the land.' His ship, the Skimmer of the Seas, made regular runs to South Shields for coal under a standing charter with the gas-works — a modest, unglamorous trade. He had a deep emotional aversion to the sea: not just a rational dislike but 'a profound and emotional animosity,' as if his love of the land and home had been bred into him through generations. He gave up his command with relief as soon as his wife inherited enough money to live on, describing his release as escaping 'from the galleys.'

Q2. Captain Hagberd constantly hinted at something that made Bessie blush. What was it?

Ans. Captain Hagberd had convinced himself that Bessie Carvil was the perfect wife for his son Harry. In his gentle, paternalistic, mad logic, he had already arranged the future: Harry would come home tomorrow, Bessie would marry him, and the two families — living side by side in the adjoining cottages — would form one happy household. He would drop hints about this plan in

almost every conversation: 'Harry will get you one (a servant)'; 'He will doubtless let you have your say about (the garden)'; 'proper age to get married with a nice, sensible girl'; 'I shall secure such a level-headed wife for my son.' He would wink conspiratorially at her when he said these things. Bessie found herself caught between embarrassment, pity, and a complicated emotional response that she barely acknowledged — for somewhere beneath her rational scepticism, she had begun to half-believe in and half-wish for the dream he was spinning.

Set 3 (Page 51)

Q1. What were Bessie's reactions to old Hagberd's ravings?

Ans. Bessie's reactions evolved over time into something complex and contradictory. Initially, his talk had discomposed her — she recognised he was mad. Gradually she learned to be amused and tolerant: 'There was no harm in him.' Then, almost without noticing, she began to take a genuine, 'unacknowledged, pleasurable, incredulous emotion' in his plans — blushing faintly at his winks, feeling a 'charm in these gentle ravings.' She listened patiently by the fence during their daily conversations, and when the fantasy became too vivid, she would gently restrain him with a 'pretence of belief.' She tried once to introduce a note of reality — suggesting Harry might be dead — but the horror it caused in Captain Hagberd frightened her so badly that she never tried again. Over time, she had settled into a quiet complicity with his delusion, partly out of compassion, partly out of loneliness, and partly because the dream of Harry's return had become, without her fully realising it, her own secret hope.

Q2. What sort of a person was Mr Carvil?

Ans. Josiah Carvil, Bessie's blind father, is one of the story's most unpleasant characters. A retired boat-builder who was struck blind in the full flush of his business, he had responded to his affliction with cruelty and self-pity directed entirely at his daughter. He treated her as if she were responsible for his blindness. He was a domestic tyrant of the most extreme kind: he made himself deliberately helpless beyond what his disability required — refusing to lift a hand, refusing to move from his chair, refusing to eat without Bessie physically present — purely to keep her enslaved. He would not put his pipe in his mouth unless she placed it there. He raged and bellowed her name at the top of his voice whenever he wanted anything, embarrassing her before the neighbourhood. Conrad compares him to 'an idol of some remarkably monstrous superstition' and 'gross and unwieldy like a hippopotamus.' His only comfort in his blindness was the declaration that he had enough money for 'ham and eggs every morning' — a fiendish assertion of material pride in place of any human warmth.

Set 4 (Page 54)

Q1. What was the point of similarity between Captain Hagberd and old Mr Carvil?

Ans. Conrad draws a careful parallel between the two old men. Both are blind — Captain Hagberd is blind to reality through the madness of hope, while Mr Carvil is physically blind. Both are tyrants who have enslaved Bessie Carvil — one through his mad paternalism and his assumption of her as Harry's bride, the other through his cruel exploitation of her filial duty. The text makes the comparison explicit: Hagberd's delusion 'had blinded his mind to truth and probability, just as the other old man in the other cottage had been made blind, by another disease, to the light and beauty of the world.' Both old men are locked in self-created worlds and both have made Bessie their prisoner — one in a cage of duty and abuse, the other in a cage of false hope and imaginary future. Bessie is thus doubly trapped, by the madness on one side of the fence and the tyranny on the other.

Q2. Why did Bessie sometimes show signs of irritation and disgust?

Ans. Bessie's irritation and disgust arose from two sources. On one side was her father's relentless cruelty — his deliberate helplessness, his bellowing demands, the way he had consumed the ten best years of her life without a moment of gratitude or tenderness. Her 'home delights had been confined to the nursing of her father during the ten best years of her life.' She had a 'tired, unrefreshed face' and 'heavy-lidded, grey, and unexpectant glance,' the portrait of a woman who can no longer imagine change. On the other side was Captain Hagberd's madness, which, though gentle, cruelly mocked her own hopelessness: 'His hopeful craze seemed to mock her own want of hope with so bitter an aptness that in her nervous irritation she could have screamed at him outright.' His endless cheerful talk of a tomorrow that would bring marriage, a servant, a new home — everything she had been denied — was a constant reminder of all she would never have. She was caught between two men whose obsessions left no room for her actual life.

Set 5 (Page 61)

Q1. Who was the stranger who met Captain Hagberd? What was the Captain's reaction to the meeting?

Ans. The stranger was Harry Hagberd — the captain's own son, who had run away from home sixteen years earlier. Harry had come to Colebrook not out of filial love but because a friend had seen the captain's advertisement in the newspaper and suggested it as a way to extract five pounds from the old man. Harry arrived with his last pennies, having spent them on the train fare and a shave 'out of respect for the old man.' His manner was easy, confident, and faintly contemptuous — the manner of a man of the world returning to a provincial backwater.

Captain Hagberd's reaction was deeply ironic. He could not recognise that the stranger was his own son. Sixteen years had passed since he had last seen Harry, and his mental image of his son was frozen at the age of fourteen — 'a clever-looking, high-spirited boy.' The actual Harry Hagberd — a grown man in his thirties — matched none of this image. Moreover, the captain had spent so long deferring Harry's return to 'tomorrow' that his mind could not process the arrival of 'today.' He reacted with suspicion, hostility, and paranoia, calling Harry 'a grinning information fellow,' warning Bessie to have nothing to do with him, and ultimately throwing a shovel at his own son from an upstairs window. His madness had rendered him incapable of recognising the very thing he had been waiting for.

Q2. What did young Hagberd think it meant when old Hagberd said that his son would be coming home 'tomorrow'?

Ans. When Bessie tells Harry that his father says his son is coming 'tomorrow,' Harry initially assumes that 'tomorrow' refers to a real, specific day — that some impostor or confidence trickster has told the old man that 'Harry Hagberd' will arrive the next day, and that the real Harry has arrived just in time to expose and confront this 'swindler.' He says: 'It's a swindle on the old man — nothing else.' He sees it as a scheme to defraud his father, and he is indignant on his father's behalf, planning to 'put a head on that coon — whoever he is!' It is only when Bessie explains the full situation — that 'tomorrow' is not a date but a permanent state of mind, an eternal deferral that has been going on for years — that Harry understands the nature of his father's madness and the full complexity of what he has walked into.

Q3. What reasons did Bessie give for encouraging old Hagberd in his insane hopes?

Ans. Bessie offers two principal reasons for having gone along with Captain Hagberd's delusion rather than contradicting it. First, compassion: 'What for should I? It would only have made him miserable. He would have gone out of his mind.' She had seen, on the one occasion she had gently questioned his hope, how the prospect of it being wrong had caused the old man a look of 'horror and incredulity, as though he had seen a crack open out in the firmament.' She was afraid, quite genuinely, that a direct confrontation with reality would destroy him.

Second, and more poignant, she admits: 'It was easier to half believe it myself.' The dream of Harry's return — and with it the dream of marriage, a home, a future, and escape from her father — had seeped into Bessie's own consciousness. She had been so starved of hope that she had borrowed his. This admission reveals the depth of her desperation: she had allowed someone else's delusion to become the closest thing to a dream she possessed.

Set 6 (Page 66)

Q1. What makes Bessie convinced that the young man is indeed Harry?

Ans. Several things convince Bessie that the stranger is genuinely Harry Hagberd. Most powerfully, when Harry suggests she imagine the old man's beard on his chin and asks 'Now say. I was the very spit of him from a boy,' Bessie murmurs 'It's true' — she can see the physical resemblance clearly. His manner of speaking — the confident, restless energy, the easy humour, the sailor's cadence — matches everything the captain had described of his high-spirited son. He knows intimate family details: how his father suffered visibly for three days before every departure on his coal runs, how the ship was called the Skimmer of the Seas, and how his mother's uncle owned her. He knows that his mother was driven to impatience by the long wait. He speaks of being chased upstairs with a leather strap — a memory no impostor would possess. These converging details, alongside the physical resemblance, leave Bessie in no doubt.

Q2. What kind of life had Harry lived after he left home?

Ans. Harry Hagberd had lived the life of a restless, wandering adventurer — rootless, self-reliant, and thoroughly free. He had been, as he says, 'everything you can think of almost but a tailor or soldier.' He had worked as a boundary rider and sheared sheep in Australia ('humped my swag'). He had been a sailor before the mast. He had harpooned a whale, rigged ships, prospected for gold, and skinned dead bullocks. He had served as an assistant to a prospecting engineer in Mexico's Sonora desert, travelling through harsh gold country. He had turned his back on fortunes. He had been in scrapes and had been bailed out by women in every port. He had been 'blind drunk for three days on purpose' just before arriving in Colebrook. He identifies himself with the Gambusinos — legendary restless prospectors of Mexico who could not be held by gold or women, who wandered for the sake of wandering. His life is the complete inversion of his father's: where the captain longed for the fireside, Harry cannot endure a closed space. He compares a house favourably to a ship only because 'in a house you can at any time open the door and walk away.'

Set 7 (Page 69)

Q1. What does Bessie tell Harry about his father's plans for him?

Ans. Bessie whispers rapidly to Harry about what his father has prepared: that the old man has been saving every penny and filling the second cottage with new furniture — tables, carpets, marble tops — all kept sealed, waiting for Harry to see them first. And crucially, that the captain has chosen Bessie herself as Harry's bride. The old man's entire scheme — the prepared home, the accumulated savings, the readied garden — is all arranged so that Harry will come home, marry Bessie, settle down, and live in domestic contentment next door to his father forever. This information enrages Harry completely. The moment he understands that his father has planned to domesticate him — to turn him into 'a tame rabbit in a cage' — his brief moment of sentimental consideration evaporates entirely. He explodes in contempt, knocks the plate of bread from Bessie's hands, and declares that not even the whole world is big enough for him to spread his elbows in, let alone a parlour in a hutch.

Q2. What did Captain Hagberd call out to Bessie from the window?

Ans. At the climactic moment when Harry and Bessie are standing together by the gate in the dark, Captain Hagberd opens his upstairs window and speaks down to them. He calls Harry 'a vagabond' and 'a grinning, information fellow,' urging Bessie to send him away. He declares that Harry — the real Harry, who will come tomorrow — will marry her, promising her 'a good home of your own.' In his madness, he fails entirely to recognise that the man below him is his own son, interpreting him instead as the latest in a long line of 'information fellows' who have come to mock or deceive him. He then cries out 'I'll tell Harry' — as though Harry were a separate, future entity he can appeal to. His final words from the window are the story's most heartbreaking: 'Never you fear — Harry shall marry you. One day more.' It is the voice, as Conrad puts it, of 'madness, lies and despair — the voice of inextinguishable hope.'

Understanding the Text

Q1. What is the consistency one finds in the old man's madness?

Ans. Captain Hagberd's madness has a perfectly coherent internal logic — it is a closed, self-sufficient system that cannot be disturbed by external reality. The consistency lies in the word 'tomorrow.' Everything — the prepared cottage, the stored furniture, the unplanted garden, the uncut beard, the canvas suit worn only 'for the time being' — is organised around the single, unshakeable certainty that Harry will come home tomorrow. When the barber mocks him, when townsfolk grin, when years pass without any sign of Harry — none of it disturbs the internal architecture of the belief, because each day that Harry does not arrive simply means the arrival has been pushed to the next tomorrow. The madness is not chaotic; it is relentlessly, obsessively orderly. Conrad shows us that this kind of insanity is in fact more stable than sanity, because it has no need to revise itself in response to evidence. The consistency of the old man's madness is also what makes it both pitiable and, in a strange way, grand — it is hope frozen in perpetuity, beyond the reach of disappointment.

Q2. How does Captain Hagberd prepare for Harry's homecoming?

Ans. The captain's preparations are meticulous and sustained over years. He has bought the second cottage and filled it carefully with furniture — tables wrapped in sacking, rolls of carpets, marble-topped surfaces — all new, all sealed from view until Harry can see them first. He digs and re-digs his front garden continuously, turning it over season after season but refusing to plant anything 'till our Harry comes home tomorrow.' He has a boxful of flower-seed packets ready for Harry and Bessie to choose from. He has mentally arranged their life together: Bessie will be Harry's wife, the fence between the gardens will be removed, a drying-line will replace it, and the yard will be concreted over. He guards these preparations jealously — no human eye, not even Bessie's, is to see the furnished cottage before Harry does. He smuggles small domestic purchases home under his canvas coat. He continues to advertise in Sunday papers. Every act of his daily life is oriented toward the moment of arrival — a moment he simultaneously insists is 'tomorrow' and perpetually defers.

Q3. How did Bessie begin to share Hagberd's insanity regarding his son?

Ans. Bessie's absorption into Hagberd's delusion was gradual and almost unconscious. It began with tolerance: she accepted his talk patiently, finding 'a charm in these gentle ravings.' Then came a quiet complicity — she would gently steady him when he grew too excited, using a 'pretence of belief, laughing a little to salve her conscience.' Then came the crucial admission: 'It was easier to half believe it myself.' Isolated, exhausted, with no prospects of her own, enslaved to a tyrannical blind father, Bessie had been quietly starving for hope. Captain Hagberd's dream offered her something she had never had: the vision of a future, a husband, a home, an escape. She did not choose this half-belief deliberately — it seeped into her through the accumulated weight of years of proximity to his obsession, and through her own desperate need. By the time Harry actually arrives, she is trembling with an emotion she barely understands — because his arrival means her privately nurtured fantasy is about to be tested against reality.

Q4. What were Harry's reasons for coming to meet old Hagberd?

Ans. Harry's reasons for coming to Colebrook were entirely mercenary and opportunistic. He had been on a prolonged drinking spree in London with a friend and had run out of money. His friend saw the old man's advertisement in the newspaper and pointed it out: 'Go on, Harry: loving parent. That's five quid sure.' Harry and his companion scraped together every penny they had for the train fare. Harry himself describes it as a 'devil of a lark' — his frame of mind is that of a man who has come to extract money from a foolish old man, not to reconcile or reconnect. He has no sentimental attachment to his father, no nostalgia for Colebrook, and no intention of staying. He came purely for 'five quid.' The story's bitter irony is that this casual, mercenary visit — made possible by the same advertisements that had been a joke to the whole town for years — is the very 'tomorrow' the old man had been waiting for. And when it arrives, he cannot recognise it, and when he recognises it, it turns out to be nothing he wanted.

Q5. Why does Harry's return prove to be a disappointment for Bessie?

Ans. Harry's return is a devastating disappointment for Bessie on every level. The dream she had half-believed in — of a kind, settled young man returning to claim his father's prepared home and marry her — is shattered by the reality of Harry Hagberd. He is charming, vital, and physically overwhelming, but he is also rootless, selfish, and constitutionally incapable of staying anywhere for more than a week. He has come for money, not for love. He reacts with contempt and fury to his father's plans. He is explicitly a Gambusino — a man who cannot be held by a woman, a home, or a prospect of gold.

He does kiss Bessie — passionately, even tenderly — but it is the kiss of a man who loves women 'at first sight' and moves on. He takes her last half-sovereign from her, and she gives it willingly, knowing even as she does so that she is 'buying him in' no more than she can 'buy herself out.' He walks away into the darkness with his 'firm, leisurely footsteps,' and she runs after him calling his name — but he does not turn back. She is left stranded between a mad old man who never stopped waiting for tomorrow, and a real man who turned out to be everything that could not stay. The 'tomorrow' has come and gone, and it has left her more alone than before.

Talking about the Text

Q1. 'Every mental state, even madness, has its equilibrium based upon self-esteem. Its disturbance causes unhappiness.'

Ans. This observation, which Conrad places within the narration as a kind of psychological law, is one of the story's most profound insights. It explains why Captain Hagberd reacts with such disproportionate hostility to those who smile at him or hint that something is 'wrong.' He is not merely annoyed — he is existentially threatened. His delusion about Harry's return is not simply a belief: it is the scaffolding of his entire identity and sense of worth. Remove it, and he has nothing. A captain who abandoned the sea, who lost his son, who is mocked by his neighbours, who failed to find the boy in time to save his wife — without the dream of Harry's return, he is simply a broken old man who wasted his life. The madness, paradoxical as it seems, gives him dignity and purpose. It provides an equilibrium.

Conrad implies that this principle applies more broadly than to obvious cases of madness. Most people's sense of self-esteem rests on certain foundational beliefs about their worth, their choices, their place in the world — and these cannot survive direct challenge without causing unhappiness. The barber who mocks Hagberd is himself caught in the fantasy: he admits he cannot help wondering, every time a strange sailor comes in, whether this might be the son of old Hagberd. Even sane people need their equilibrium of self-regard, and they resist whatever disturbs it.

Q2. Joyce's 'Eveline' and Conrad's 'Tomorrow' are thematically similar.

Ans. The thematic connection between the two stories is rich and illuminating. Both centre on paralysis — the inability to seize the possibility of escape or change that stands directly before a character. Eveline stands at the gangway and cannot board; Captain Hagberd stands at his gate and cannot recognise his own son. In both stories, the possibility of release arrives and is missed: Eveline through fear and conditioning, Hagberd through the very delusion that was supposed to prepare him for the moment.

Both stories explore the psychology of waiting and the ways in which hope, deferred and distorted, becomes a prison. Eveline has told herself she is waiting for the right moment to leave, but the waiting has become the life itself. Hagberd has told himself he is waiting for tomorrow, but tomorrow can never arrive because arriving would end the waiting — and the waiting is all he has.

Both stories also involve women trapped by duty to abusive fathers. Bessie Carvil and Eveline Hill are strikingly similar figures: young women of intelligence and sensitivity whose lives have been consumed by the care of tyrannical, selfish men, and who glimpse — briefly and painfully — the possibility of a different life, only to have it snatched away. Both stories end in a kind of living death: Eveline turned to stone at the dock, Bessie 'tottering silently back towards her stuffy little inferno of a cottage,' hearing the voice of Captain Hagberd shouting of his trust in an everlasting tomorrow.

Appreciation

Q1. Comment on the technique used by the author to unfold the story of Captain Hagberd's past.

Ans. Conrad employs an indirect, layered narrative technique to unfold Hagberd's backstory — what he called, in his broader practice, the method of 'delayed decoding' or 'frame narration.' Rather than narrating the captain's past directly, Conrad gives it to us through the voice of the Colebrook barber, who tells it to a stranger in the tap-room of the New Inn. This technique creates several effects simultaneously. It establishes an ironic distance between the reader and the subject: the barber is sardonic, superior, and amused — he sees the old man's tragedy as local colour, a 'craze, like any other.' We therefore receive the pathos of Hagberd's situation filtered through this comic, unsympathetic frame, which makes the underlying tragedy all the sharper by contrast.

The technique also establishes the social reality of Hagberd's position — he is, in the eyes of the community, a figure of ridicule and mild pity, nothing more. This conditions how we read his subsequent scenes with Bessie, who is the only person who treats him with genuine, if complicated, compassion. Furthermore, by presenting the backstory as gossip rather than authoritative narration, Conrad creates a sense of incompleteness and uncertainty — the barber doesn't know everything, and what he knows he colours with his own attitudes. This subtlety is characteristic of Conrad's narrative art: the story is always larger than any single teller can contain.

Q2. Identify instances in the story in which you find streaks of insanity in people other than Hagberd. What implications do they suggest?

Ans. Conrad distributes 'streaks of insanity' across the story with great skill, implying that the old captain's madness is not an isolated aberration but rather an extreme version of tendencies present in everyone around him.

The Colebrook Barber: He mocks Captain Hagberd relentlessly, but admits that the craze is 'catching' — that he himself cannot help wondering, every time a strange sailor comes in, whether this might be Harry Hagberd. The very fantasy he derides has lodged itself in his mind.

Bessie Carvil: As discussed above, Bessie has allowed the captain's delusion to become 'half' her own. She has invested real emotional hope in a fantasy she knows to be groundless. Her behaviour at the end of the story — running into the dark street calling 'Harry!' — is itself a brief, heartbreaking lapse into the madness she has been humouring.

Old Mr Carvil: His tyranny is itself a form of insanity — a monstrous, self-destructive stubbornness that has made himself helpless in order to dominate his daughter. There is no rational purpose served by his refusal to lift a hand; it is compulsive and irrational.

Harry Hagberd himself: His cheerful recklessness, his absolute inability to remain in one place, his identification with the Gambusinos who 'wandered alone... here today, and gone, God knows where, tomorrow' — these are traits that, in a different register, mirror his father's obsession. The father cannot imagine leaving; the son cannot imagine staying. Both are prisoners of their own natures, and both cause damage to those around them.

The implication is profound: Conrad suggests that the line between sanity and madness is not as clear as the townspeople's mockery of Hagberd implies. Every consciousness has its own organising delusion, its own 'tomorrow' that keeps it going. The only difference is whether society has decided to call it common sense or madness.

Language Work

A. Figures of Speech: Allusion — Task

The task asks students to identify one or two other examples of allusion in the story and comment on the comparison made.

Example 1:

'...a man roughened out of granite, standing in a wilderness not big enough for a decent billiard-room.'

This is an allusion to the tradition of depicting ancient, solitary figures — gods, giants, or prophets — standing in a wilderness. The image of a man 'roughened out of granite' calls to mind statues of ancient deities or biblical figures hewn from stone. Combined with 'a wilderness not big enough for a decent billiard-room,' it creates bathos — a sudden comic deflation of the grand image. The allusion implies that Hagberd has a certain monumental, stone-like stubbornness and permanence, but also that this grandeur is absurdly out of proportion to his cramped, provincial surroundings.

Example 2:

'...she began to totter silently back towards her stuffy little inferno of a cottage. It had no lofty portal, no terrific inscription of forfeited hopes—she did not understand wherein she had sinned.'

This is an allusion to the inscription above the gate of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.' The 'lofty portal' and 'terrific inscription' evoke Dante's vision of Hell as a place one enters, understanding precisely why one is condemned. Conrad uses the allusion with devastating irony: Bessie's 'inferno' — her cramped cottage, her blind tyrannical father, her hopeless life — has no such clarity. There is no inscription because she does not know what sin she has committed to deserve this life. The allusion elevates her suffering to a near-mythic scale while simultaneously emphasising its senselessness.

B. Pronunciation: Stress Patterns in Verb/Noun Pairs

When words shift grammatical function between verb and noun, the stress pattern often shifts accordingly. In two-syllable words, verbs tend to stress the second syllable, while nouns tend to stress the first.

Completed table with primary stress marked (stressed syllable in CAPITALS):

present (verb) — pre-SENT / present (noun) — PRE-sent

examine (verb) — ex-AM-ine / examination (noun) — ex-am-i-NA-tion

produce (verb) — pro-DUCE / production (noun) — pro-DUC-tion

calculate (verb) — CAL-cu-late / calculation (noun) — cal-cu-LA-tion

distribute (verb) — dis-TRIB-ute / distribution (noun) — dis-tri-BU-tion

specialise (verb) — SPE-cial-ise / specialisation (noun) — spe-cial-i-SA-tion

Note: In most verb-to-noun derivations ending in '-tion' or '-ation', the primary stress shifts to the syllable immediately before the suffix '-tion'. This is a reliable pattern in English and helps students correctly stress words like 'information' (in-for-MA-tion), 'hesitation' (hes-i-TA-tion), and those in the table above.

Chapter 5: One Centimetre

— Bi Shu-min (translated from Chinese)

Stop and Think

Set 1 (Page 75)

Q1. What made Tao Ying decide whether to buy a ticket or not when she rode a bus alone?

Ans. Tao Ying's decision about buying a bus ticket when she rode alone was entirely based on the vigilance of the conductor. She was a practical, cash-conscious woman who reasoned — somewhat self-servingly — that her presence on the bus made no real difference to its operating costs, so why pay unnecessarily? If the conductor appeared responsible and alert, she would buy a ticket promptly. But if he seemed casual and inattentive, she would not bother, treating her fare-dodging as 'a small punishment for him and a little saving for herself.' This logic is simultaneously amusing and morally questionable, and Bi Shu-min presents it without judgment, establishing Tao Ying from the outset as a character who is honest about her own small compromises while holding herself to a higher standard in front of her son.

Q2. Why did she insist on buying tickets both for herself and her son that day?

Ans. That day, Tao Ying was with her son Xiao Ye, which changed everything. Even though the conductor was fierce and ill-tempered — the very type who would normally have discouraged her from buying a ticket at all — she bought two tickets without hesitation. The reason was entirely Xiao Ye. He had reminded her immediately: 'Mama, tickets!' Children treat rituals seriously, and a ride without a ticket was not a proper ride in his eyes. More importantly, Tao Ying had made a promise to Xiao Ye that the next time he was tall enough, she would buy him his own ticket. His face was raised like a half-open blossom, waiting for her to keep her word. Twenty cents was not trivial to her, but she could not let her son down. Buying the tickets was an act of love, of promise-keeping, and of the self-image she was trying to model for him — that of a gracious, dignified, trustworthy mother.

Set 2 (Page 81)

Q1. Did Tao Ying really intend to cheat at the temple?

Ans. No — Tao Ying had no intention of cheating at the temple. She genuinely believed, based on the printed rule on the back of the ticket, that children under 110 centimetres did not need to pay. She had observed Xiao Ye's height herself that morning on the bus and had concluded he was just under the limit. She was confident enough to cite the rule publicly, read it aloud from the ticket box, and stand her ground even when the guard challenged her. The confusion arose partly from Xiao Ye standing taller than she expected (perhaps stretching slightly, or naturally growing), and partly from the guard's aggressive insistence. Tao Ying's entire character as established in the story — her careful, self-conscious performance of honesty for Xiao Ye's benefit, her refusal to claim back bus tickets on private outings, her willingness to buy the ticket even when it was unnecessary on the bus — makes it clear that she was acting in good faith throughout the temple incident.

Q2. Why did Tao Ying change her intention to buy another ticket?

Ans. Tao Ying had initially been prepared to simply buy the additional ticket to end the confrontation and get on with Xiao Ye's day. But at the critical moment, Xiao Ye turned to her with an expression of 'surprise and bewilderment' and asked: 'Mama, did you really not buy a ticket?' The look on her child's face stopped her cold. If she bought the ticket now, after all that had happened in public, it would look to Xiao Ye as though she had genuinely tried to cheat — as though the guard and the crowd were right and she was wrong. She could not allow her son to

walk away believing his mother was a cheat and a liar. Her entire project of being a 'perfect, flawless mother' — the model of honesty and dignity she had been building for years — would collapse in that moment. So she took Xiao Ye by the hand and left. The cost of the ticket was nothing; the cost to her son's image of her was everything.

Set 3 (Page 85)

Q1. Were the old lady's scales a reliable measure of height and weight? What convoluted logic were her measurements based on?

Ans. No, the old lady's scales were not reliable at all. She freely admitted that they were old and inaccurate. She had deliberately adjusted them to make people seem lighter and taller than they actually were. Her reasoning was a cheerful mix of flattery and commercial cunning: she explained that it was 'fashionable to be long and lean,' so she offered what she called 'fitness scales' — scales that told people what they wanted to hear. Her logic was that since mothers want their sons to grow tall, she would oblige. This is why Xiao Ye measured at 111 centimetres on her scales — one centimetre over the limit — when in reality, as Tao Ying's careful tape-measure at home later confirmed, he was only 109 centimetres. The old woman was commercially savvy: happy customers paid; unhappy ones did not come back.

Q2. What was the conflict between the mother and son?

Ans. The conflict was built on Xiao Ye's loss of trust in his mother. At the temple, the guard had publicly shamed Tao Ying, insisting that Xiao Ye was over the height limit. Then the old woman's scales showed him at 111 centimetres. From Xiao Ye's perspective, this was confirmation: every measurement except his mother's said he was tall enough. He concluded, painfully and with the raw logic of a child, that his mother had simply been trying to avoid buying him a ticket — that her measurements, her explanations, her insistence were all a cover for cheapness. When Tao Ying tries to re-measure him at home, Xiao Ye refuses, saying: 'I don't trust you! I don't trust you!' This is the wound at the heart of the story: not the dishonest guard, not the inaccurate scales, but the shattering of a little boy's faith in his mother's honesty. The tape measure, which Tao Ying has always wielded as an instrument of truth, has become, in Xiao Ye's eyes, 'a poisonous viper.'

Understanding the Text

Q1. How did Tao Ying's son influence the way she led her life?

Ans. Xiao Ye was the single most powerful shaping force in Tao Ying's conscious life. He transformed her from a practical, morally flexible woman who dodged bus fares when convenient into someone who subjected every action to an imaginary child's-eye scrutiny. She describes this as 'like carrying an audience with you wherever you go.' She is not a naturally privileged or educated person — she is a factory canteen cook, a blue-collar worker of modest means — but her desire to be 'the ideal mother' elevated every small daily act into a moral statement.

She refused to bite close to the watermelon rind (even though she saw no real difference) because she did not want to model wasteful eating. She would not claim back bus ticket stubs on personal outings because Xiao Ye might ask an embarrassing question. She bought him a ticket even when the conductor said it was not required, because she had made a promise and breaking it in front of him was unthinkable. She endured public humiliation at the temple rather than buy a ticket under accusation, because doing so would have made her appear guilty in her son's eyes. It was Xiao Ye's gaze — or rather, Tao Ying's internalised sense of what that gaze demanded — that shaped her ethics, her self-image, and her courage.

Q2. Pick out instances from the story to show that official rules are often arbitrary.

Ans. The story is built around the arbitrariness of official rules, and Bi Shu-min illustrates this with precision and irony. On the bus, the height marker for a child's ticket is 1.10 metres, but the conductor himself tells Tao Ying that Xiao Ye is one centimetre short and therefore does not need a ticket — even when she wants to buy one. At the temple, the same rule (children under 110 centimetres do not pay) is interpreted by the guard in a way that contradicts Tao Ying's reading of the printed text, despite the rule being the same in both places. The guard invokes 'the International Standard Ruler in Paris, made of pure platinum' to overwhelm Tao Ying with the authority of measurement — a piece of information entirely irrelevant to whether Xiao Ye is over or under 110 centimetres. When the temple officials finally come to investigate, they measure Xiao Ye at exactly 110 centimetres — the borderline — but Tao Ying correctly points out that a month and nine days have passed since the incident, and he was not that tall then. The officials cannot refute this, and they produce compensation money, implicitly acknowledging that the earthworm line on the wall had not been drawn accurately. The entire episode demonstrates how rules that appear precise (a number, a line, a printed regulation) are actually applied arbitrarily depending on who is enforcing them and in what mood.

Q3. Tao Ying was very careful about spending money. What were her reasons for refusing the compensation offered by the temple officials?

Ans. Tao Ying's refusal of the five-dollar compensation and the two complimentary tickets was entirely in keeping with the deeper logic of her character, even though it appears financially irrational for a woman who counts bus fares and measures watermelon seeds. She refused the money because what had been taken from her that day at the temple was not money but something far more valuable: her son's trust and the dignity she had been carefully building as his mother. No financial sum could restore those. As she says, with quiet finality: 'That day's happiness can never be bought again.' The temple, now forever associated with humiliation and the look of betrayal in Xiao Ye's eyes, held no appeal — so the complimentary tickets were equally worthless to her. What she wanted could not be purchased; it could only be restored by the truth being told directly to Xiao Ye.

Q4. Why was her final vindication important to Tao Ying?

Ans. Tao Ying's final request to the temple officials was not for money, tickets, or even a formal apology — it was for them to explain to her son, in front of her, that his mother had done nothing wrong. This is the story's emotional and thematic climax. The entire ordeal had been painful not because of the public humiliation or the financial unfairness, but because it had cracked the foundation of her relationship with Xiao Ye. His look of betrayal, his refusal to be measured, his cry of 'I don't trust you!' — these were the real injuries. Tao Ying understood that no amount of her own insistence could restore what had been lost; a child who suspects his mother of dishonesty needs to hear the truth from an authority he cannot doubt. By asking the officials — men in uniform, representatives of the very institution that had wronged her — to vindicate her to her son, she was repairing the most important thing in her world: her son's image of her as a woman of integrity. This was the only form of compensation that had any meaning.

Talking about the Text

Q1. The way a child looks at the world is very different from that of an adult.

Ans. This story beautifully illustrates the profound difference between a child's and an adult's perception of the world. For Xiao Ye, the world is simple, consistent, and moral. Rules mean what they say. A ticket is a ticket. Measurements are facts. If the guard says he is over 110 centimetres, and the old woman's scales agree, then his mother must be wrong — or lying. A child cannot accommodate the adult complexities of inaccurate scales, badly drawn earthworm lines, and aggressive guards exceeding their brief. He can only see the surface: his mother did not buy a ticket, people said she was wrong, and now she is trying to re-measure him to prove a point. His world is one of clear moral categories — honest or dishonest, right or wrong, trustworthy or not.

Tao Ying's world, by contrast, is a web of negotiations, compromises, and context. She dodges fares when alone but pays punctiliously when Xiao Ye is watching. She knows the watermelon rind is just as good as the flesh but eats only the flesh in front of him. She understands that the guard is young and inexperienced, that official rules are applied arbitrarily, that the old woman's scales are commercially adjusted. Her moral world is not simpler but more complicated — and it is precisely this complexity that a child cannot yet perceive. The one centimetre of the title is not just a physical measurement: it is the gap between the child's world of clear certainties and the adult's world of ambiguous realities.

Q2. There is always a gap between what we really are and what we wish to appear to be to others.

Ans. Tao Ying is the story's study in this gap. In reality, she is a resourceful, pragmatic woman who evades bus fares when she can get away with it, who calculates the cost of vegetables against the cost of a child's ticket, and who is frank about her own ordinariness. She does not come from a privileged background; she has not read many books; she is a cook in a factory canteen. But she wishes to appear — and more importantly, to be — gracious, dignified, and principled. She wants Xiao Ye to grow up believing he comes from a cultured home, to have a mother who is 'the most perfect, flawless mother possible.'

This gap between the real and the ideal self is not mere vanity — it is aspirational. The Tao Ying who dodges fares alone is different from the Tao Ying who buys two tickets in front of Xiao Ye, but the second Tao Ying is also real, and perhaps more genuinely herself. The story suggests that the self we perform for those we love is not necessarily false — it can be the self we are in the process of becoming. The tragedy of the temple incident is that the gap was exposed in front of the one person for whom she most needed it to appear seamless.

Appreciation

Q1. Comment on the significance of the first sentence of the story to its theme.

Ans. The story's opening sentence — 'When Tao Ying rides on the bus alone, quite often she does not bother to buy a ticket' — is a masterstroke of characterisation and thematic setting. It immediately establishes Tao Ying as a morally complex, honest narrator: she does not conceal her small dishonesty but presents it plainly and without apology. This openness signals that the story will deal with moral ambiguity rather than simple virtue or vice.

The sentence also sets up the story's central tension: the gap between Tao Ying's private compromises and her public performance of virtue, particularly before Xiao Ye. The phrase 'when she rides alone' is crucial — it immediately implies that she behaves differently when her son is present. The entire story flows from this distinction. The one centimetre of the title is thus prefigured in the very first sentence: the story is about the small, calibrated distances between what we are and what we wish to appear to be, between honest imperfection and the ideal we hold up for those we love.

Q2. Would you describe the author's portrayal of Tao Ying's character in the story as sympathetic, critical or realistic?

Ans. Bi Shu-min's portrayal of Tao Ying is most accurately described as realistic — and it is this commitment to realism that generates both the sympathy and the gentle critique. The author does not idealise Tao Ying: she is a fare-dodger, she is not well-educated, she makes small hypocrisies a part of daily life, and her project of being the 'perfect mother' occasionally tips into an exhausting performance. These are presented honestly and without excuse.

Yet the portrayal is also deeply sympathetic, because Bi Shu-min shows us the sincerity beneath the contradictions. Tao Ying genuinely loves her son. Her compromises — not claiming back bus stubs, not biting the watermelon rind — are made with a kind of loving discipline that is touching

precisely because it costs her something. Her refusal of compensation, her final request to the officials — these are acts of extraordinary moral integrity from a woman of very modest means and education. The author neither condescends nor sentimentalises: she simply watches Tao Ying with clear-eyed affection, and allows the reader to arrive at admiration by their own route. This is the mark of a realistic portrayal at its finest.

Q3. Identify the episodes that bring out the ambivalent attitude to ethics commonly seen in human life.

Ans. The story is built on a series of episodes that capture the ambivalence at the heart of everyday ethical life. First and most obviously: Tao Ying evades bus fares when alone but buys two tickets when with Xiao Ye, even buying one for him when the conductor says it is not required. The same woman who cheats the system insists on paying more than necessary. Second: the watermelon episode. Tao Ying eats only the flesh in front of Xiao Ye to model refined behaviour, then furiously scolds him for doing exactly the same thing — forgetting she was the one who taught him. Third: the bus stub incident, where she gives up a legitimate financial saving because she cannot lie in front of her child. Fourth: the temple confrontation, where a woman who cheerfully evades bus fares refuses, on principle, to buy a ticket under false accusation. Fifth: Lao Chiang and the 'Big Reference' — the unofficial restricted publication, obtained through questionable means, which earns him Tao Ying's admiration. Finally: the old woman's deliberately inaccurate scales — commercial dishonesty dressed up as customer service. Each episode layers complexity onto what might initially appear to be simple moral choices, showing that in real life, ethics is rarely a matter of consistent principle but of context, relationship, and self-image.

Q4. How effectively does the narrative technique adopted in this story illustrate 'unity of thought'?

Ans. The story achieves a remarkable unity of thought through its single, sustained perspective: everything is seen through Tao Ying's consciousness. Bi Shu-min never shifts to the guard's point of view, or Xiao Ye's, or the temple officials'. We understand other characters only through how Tao Ying perceives them — the young guard as too inexperienced to be a father, the old woman as kind but cunning, the officials as potentially unreasonable since they employed the guard. This tight focalization creates consistency and intimacy: the reader inhabits Tao Ying's world completely, experiencing her calculations, her embarrassments, her love, and her quiet heroism from the inside.

The 'one centimetre' of the title runs as a unifying thread through every episode: the one centimetre on the bus, the one centimetre at the temple, the two centimetres the guard claims Xiao Ye grew, the month-and-nine-days by which Xiao Ye has grown since the incident. This single, precise, apparently trivial measurement expands metaphorically to encompass the entire story's thematic concerns — the small distances between honesty and compromise, between a child's world and an adult's, between dignity and humiliation, between a mother's real self and her ideal self. The technique of weaving literal measurements into a metaphorical framework gives the story its striking unity.

Language Work

A. Figures of Speech — Task

Similes from the story:

1. 'As the doors shut her jacket is caught, ballooning up like a tent behind her.'

Comparison: the jacket's inflated shape compared to a tent. The word 'like' makes the comparison explicit. The simile captures the comic, awkward physical moment vividly.

2. 'Xiao Ye's hair looks as fluffy as a bundle of straw.'

Comparison: the texture and appearance of the boy's dry, untamed hair compared to a bundle of straw. The simile conveys both the physical quality of the hair and Tao Ying's mixture of affection and mild exasperation.

3. 'But Xiao Ye's face is raised up like a half-open blossom, waiting to receive his promise from the sun.'

Comparison: Xiao Ye's upturned, expectant face compared to a flower opening towards sunlight. The simile is tender and lyrical, capturing the child's trust and need.

4. '...the guard is poised to examine their tickets. Tao Ying thinks that this man can't be very bright.'

(Not a simile — but note the contrast with: 'The fierce conductor has beady eyes' — description without simile.)

5. 'He points at a red line on the wall which looks like an earthworm inching across the road after a rainstorm.'

Comparison: the painted height-mark line on the wall compared to a wriggling earthworm. The simile subtly diminishes the authority of the official measurement, reducing it to something small and squirmy — it also becomes a motif throughout the story.

6. 'Tao Ying's hands are trembling like the strings on a pei-pa.'

Comparison: the trembling of Tao Ying's hands compared to the vibrating strings of a pei-pa (a Chinese lute). The simile conveys her emotional agitation through a culturally specific musical image.

7. 'The white of the wall looks like a virgin canvas and Xiao Ye a painting filling up the space.'

Comparison: the white wall is compared to an empty canvas; Xiao Ye standing against it is compared to a painting. The simile is aesthetically tender, framing the child as a work of art.

8. 'Xiao Ye is every inch the hero as he approaches the earthworm.' (figurative expression — not strict simile but heroic comparison)

Metaphors from the story:

1. 'But in order to melt the ice in her son's eyes, she must do something.'

Metaphor: 'ice in her son's eyes' represents the coldness, distance, and distrust that Xiao Ye now feels towards his mother. The metaphor makes an abstract emotional state concrete and tactile.

2. 'The yellow tape in Tao Ying's hands has turned into a poisonous viper.'

Metaphor: the tape measure, normally an instrument of truth and care, has been transformed in Xiao Ye's perception into something dangerous and threatening. The metaphor captures his distrust vividly — the very tool his mother used to vindicate herself now feels like a weapon to him.

3. 'The days have been like the white flour she works with, one very much like another.'

Technically a simile, but functions metaphorically: the emptiness of the waiting period is compared to the uniform, undifferentiated flour — each day as blank and identical as the last.

4. 'This was very difficult, like shooting down aeroplanes with a small gun.'

Simile-cum-metaphor: the effort of maintaining a perfect example for her son is compared to an impossible military feat — an expression of the disproportionate effort required for an ambitious goal.

B. Pronunciation: Noun/Verb Stress Shift — Task

The following words change their stress pattern (and sometimes vowel quality in the first syllable) depending on whether they are used as nouns or verbs. As nouns, stress typically falls on the first syllable; as verbs, on the second.

conduct:

As noun — CON-duct (stress on first syllable; 'con' rhymes with 'don')

As verb — con-DUCT (stress on second syllable; 'con' rhymes with 'sun')

protest:

As noun — PRO-test (stress on first syllable; 'pro' rhymes with 'go')

As verb — pro-TEST (stress on second syllable; 'pro' rhymes with 'the')

permit:

As noun — PER-mit (stress on first syllable; 'per' rhymes with 'her')

As verb — per-MIT (stress on second syllable; 'per' sounds like 'puh')

progress:

As noun — PRO-gress (stress on first syllable; 'pro' rhymes with 'go')

As verb — pro-GRESS (stress on second syllable; 'pro' rhymes with 'the')

desert:

As noun — DES-ert (stress on first syllable; 'des' rhymes with 'mess')

As verb — de-SERT (stress on second syllable; 'de' sounds like 'duh'; the word then means to abandon)

Note on vowel change: Just as 'ob-' in 'object' (noun) sounds like 'bob' but in 'object' (verb) sounds like 'hub', similar first-syllable vowel shifts occur in these words. The pattern is consistent: nouns carry full vowel quality in the first syllable, while verbs reduce the first syllable to a schwa sound (unstressed).

Chapter 6: A Lecture Upon the Shadow

— John Donne (1572–1631)

About the Poem

John Donne is the foremost of the Metaphysical poets of seventeenth-century England. Metaphysical poetry is characterised by intellectual ingenuity, elaborate and extended metaphors (called conceits), philosophical exploration of themes such as love, death, and religion, and a preference for direct, conversational speech rather than conventional poetic diction. Donne's love poetry in particular is celebrated for its complexity, wit, and the startling images it uses to explore emotional experience.

'A Lecture Upon the Shadow' is a dramatic monologue in which a lover addresses his beloved as they stand together in the midday sun. The poem uses the movement of shadows through a day — from long morning shadows, through the shadowless noon, to the long evening shadows — as an extended metaphor (or conceit) for the arc of love: from young, secretive love, through perfect mature love, to the beginning of its decline. The poem is a meditation on love's fragility and the perfection — and impossibility — of sustaining it at its peak.

The Poem (for reference)

*Stand still and I will read to thee
A Lecture, Love, in loves philosophy,
These three houres that we have spent,
Walking here, Two shadowes went
Along with us, which we our selves produc'd;
But, now the Sunne is just above our head,
We doe those shadowes tread;
And to brave cleannesse all things are reduc'd.
So whilst our infant loves did grow,
Disguises did, and shadowes, flow,
From us, and our cares; but now 'tis not so.
That love hath not attain'd the high'st degree,
Which is still diligent lest others see.
Except our loves at this noone stay,
We shall new shadowes make the other way.
As the first were made to blinde
Others; these which come behinde
Will worke upon our selves, and blind our eyes.
If our loves faint, and westwardly decline;
To me thou, falsely thine;
And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.
The morning shadowes were away,
But these grow longer all the day,
But oh, loves day is short, if love decay.
Love is a growing, or full constant light;
And his first minute, after noone, is night.*

Paraphrase and Summary

The poem is set in the real-world scenario of two lovers who have been walking together for three hours. The poet-lover turns to his beloved and says: 'Stand still — let me teach you a lesson about love.' He observes that during their morning walk, their shadows preceded them or fell beside them. But now that the sun is directly overhead at noon, there are no shadows — they are standing in full, clear light. He uses this as an analogy: early love, like the morning, produces shadows — concealments, disguises, the secrecy that young lovers maintain to hide their relationship from the world. But love that has reached its highest, most perfect state is like noon — pure, transparent, with nothing hidden.

He then warns: if their love does not stay at this perfect noon-state, it will begin to decline, and new shadows will form — but these will be different from the morning shadows. The morning shadows fell outward (away from the lovers), blinding others. The afternoon shadows will fall inward (toward the lovers), blinding themselves. If love fades, the lovers will begin to deceive not the world but each other. The poem ends with a stark, epigrammatic declaration: love is either 'a growing, or full constant light' — and the first minute after noon is already night.

Understanding the Poem

Q1. How do the shadows before noon differ from the shadows after noon? What do the two kinds of shadow represent?

Ans. Before noon — morning shadows: In the morning, when the sun is low in the east, shadows are long and fall ahead of and around the walkers. The poet describes these as shadows that they 'produc'd' themselves — they were the product of the lovers' own early relationship. These morning shadows represent the disguises and concealments of young, 'infant' love. When love is new and vulnerable, lovers are secretive about it; they hide it from others. The morning shadows thus represent outward concealment — they 'blinde others,' preventing outsiders from seeing the truth of the relationship. The shadow falls away from the lovers, toward the world.

After noon — afternoon shadows: As the sun moves past its zenith and begins to decline westward, the shadows fall in the opposite direction — now behind and lengthening away from the sun. These afternoon shadows are more dangerous, because they 'work upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.' They represent the self-deception and mutual dishonesty that creeps into a love that is beginning to fade. When love declines, the lovers no longer hide their relationship from the world — instead, they hide the truth from each other. The shadow turns inward, and the lovers begin to deceive one another. These are shadows of infidelity and pretence within the relationship.

In summary: morning shadows = concealment from the world (protective, harmless); afternoon shadows = concealment from each other (corrosive, destructive).

Q2. Love is described as light. What makes the poet talk about shadows?

Ans. The central conceit of the poem rests on the relationship between light and shadow in nature: where there is light, there are shadows; the shadow's length, direction, and intensity all depend on the position of the light source. Donne uses this natural phenomenon to map the emotional trajectory of love. Love is equated with light — in the poem's climactic final couplet: 'Love is a growing, or full constant light.' Light in this context means clarity, truth, openness, and the full illumination of two people who know and trust each other completely.

But in nature, perfect, shadowless light exists only at the precise moment of noon — when the sun is directly overhead. Before and after that moment, shadows exist. Similarly, Donne argues, perfect love — love at its highest, most transparent, most honest degree — exists only at a single peak. Before it reaches that peak, shadows of concealment are necessary (to protect the young love from outside interference). After it passes that peak, shadows of deception form (as the love begins to decline and the lovers begin to deceive each other). The shadows are therefore not

extraneous to the image of love as light — they are its natural and inevitable accompaniments when love is not at its zenith.

Q3. Comment on the use of the image of the shadows for the idea that the poet wants to convey.

Ans. The shadow image is a brilliant example of Donne's metaphysical conceit — a sustained, intellectually elaborate comparison that illuminates an abstract idea through precise physical observation. The conceit works on multiple levels simultaneously. Physically, it is accurate: shadows are longest in the morning and evening, absent at solar noon. The image is grounded in observable, everyday reality, which gives the poem's abstract argument about love a concrete, verifiable foundation — characteristic of Donne's metaphysical style.

Symbolically, the shadow functions with great precision. In the morning phase, the shadow falls outward — away from the lovers and toward the surrounding world. This perfectly captures the nature of early love: the disguise faces outward, toward those who might disapprove, judge, or interfere. In the afternoon phase, the shadow falls inward — toward the lovers themselves. This captures the nature of declining love: the deception is no longer directed at the world but is internal, intimate, and self-destructive. The reversal of direction is both physically accurate and symbolically exact.

Furthermore, the shadow image allows Donne to argue that concealment itself is not inherently bad — it is natural to early love, just as morning shadows are natural to morning. What matters is where the love stands in relation to its noon. The image therefore avoids moral simplicity: it acknowledges that young lovers must conceal, and does not condemn them for it. The condemnation is reserved for the afternoon shadows — the self-deception of declining love.

Q4. The poet seems to be addressing his beloved in the poem. What is the message he wishes to convey to her?

Ans. The poem is a dramatic monologue — the poet-lover addresses his beloved directly, positioning himself as her teacher ('I will read to thee / A Lecture'). The immediate setting is the lovers standing in the noon sun, and the message is both specific and urgent: their love has reached its perfect, complete, shadowless state — and they must hold it there. The noon of love is the moment of absolute openness, where nothing is hidden from each other or from the world. He is telling her: we have arrived at this perfection; do not let it slide.

The deeper and more sobering message is the warning: love cannot stand still. It is always either growing toward the light or declining away from it. If it begins to decline even by 'a first minute after noon,' it is already night. The shadows of mutual deception will grow, and the love that was once illuminated and honest will become dark with pretence. The message is therefore at once a declaration of love at its height and a warning about its fragility: 'Except our loves at this noone stay' — if you cannot hold this moment, everything changes. The poem asks its beloved to recognise the preciousness and precariousness of the present peak.

Q5. Instead of 'A Lecture Upon Love' the poet calls the poem 'A Lecture Upon the Shadow'. What is the effect that this has on our reading of the poem?

Ans. The title is a deliberate and carefully considered choice. 'A Lecture Upon Love' would have been conventional — a title that signals a poem about love, in a long tradition of such poems. But 'A Lecture Upon the Shadow' is unexpected, almost abstract, and immediately signals that this is not a conventional love poem. It foregrounds the conceit — the shadow — rather than the subject — love — and this has several important effects.

First, it signals the metaphysical method: this is a poem that approaches love obliquely, through a scientific or philosophical observation about the natural world. By naming the shadow rather than love, Donne signals that the poem will work through intellectual wit and extended comparison rather than through lyrical emotion. Second, the title creates a mystery that the poem resolves:

what does a shadow have to do with love? The reader is drawn in to discover the connection. Third, the title also gives the poem a tone of academic detachment — a 'lecture' is a formal, reasoned presentation of argument. This ironic combination of the intimate (love, addressed directly to a beloved) and the pedagogical (a lecture, a philosophy lesson) is characteristic of Donne's wit and perfectly captures the poem's dual nature: both a tender love poem and a cold philosophical warning.

Language Work

1. Old Spelling — the dropped 'e'

The textbook identifies words such as 'houres', 'shadowes', 'Sunne', 'noone', 'clearnesse', and 'behinde' as examples of words that carried a final 'e' in Donne's period (early 17th century) that was later dropped from English orthography. These reflect the transitional state of Early Modern English spelling.

Other words in the poem with this same feature:

'produc'd' — in spelling conventions of the time, this would have been 'produced' with the final 'e' present even in the contracted form

'reduc'd' — similarly 'reduced'

'attain'd' — from 'attained'; the 'e' dropped when the past tense suffix contracted

'worke' — modern: 'work' (the final 'e' was present)

'blinde' — modern: 'blind'

'behinde' — modern: 'behind'

'decline' — this form is actually retained in modern English, making it one of the few words in the poem where Donne's spelling is identical to ours

'disguise' — same as modern English

'clearnesse' — modern: 'clearness' (the double 's' and retained final 'e' pattern)

Note: The retention of the final 'e' was partly a matter of convention and partly phonetic — in some dialects and registers of the period, the 'e' was still lightly pronounced, particularly in verse, to maintain metrical regularity.

2. The Apostrophe and Possessive — 'loves philosophy'

In Donne's period, the possessive form was not indicated by an apostrophe followed by 's' (as in modern English: 'love's philosophy'). The possessive was formed simply by the inflected ending without the apostrophe marker. Thus 'loves philosophy' means 'love's philosophy' — the philosophy of love. Students should be aware that when reading Early Modern English texts, the absence of an apostrophe does not necessarily mean the word is a simple plural; context must be used to distinguish.

3. Adjectives in Phrases: 'infant loves' and 'brave clearnesse'

The task asks students to consider the meanings of the adjectives 'infant' and 'brave' both in isolation and as part of these specific phrases.

'infant' — in isolation:

In isolation, 'infant' means a very young child, a baby, or by extension, anything in its earliest, most undeveloped stage. It carries connotations of helplessness, vulnerability, and the need for protection.

'infant loves' — in the phrase:

Within the phrase, 'infant loves' refers to love in its earliest stage — new, tender, not yet fully formed or tested. The adjective is used metaphorically: love is given the attribute of infancy, suggesting that it is still growing, still vulnerable, and still in need of protection through concealment. The connotation of helplessness and the need to be sheltered from the world is precisely the quality Donne wishes to evoke: young love must hide because it cannot yet withstand exposure.

'brave' — in isolation:

In modern English, 'brave' primarily means courageous or fearless. However, in Donne's period (Early Modern English), 'brave' also carried the meanings of 'splendid', 'fine', 'excellent', 'showy', or 'bright'. This older meaning is closer to the French origin of the word (*bravoure*) and is related to the Italian 'bravo' (excellent).

'brave clearnesse' — in the phrase:

In the phrase, 'brave clearnesse' means 'splendid clarity' or 'magnificent transparency.' This is the state achieved at noon, when no shadows exist and everything is revealed in full, brilliant light. The word 'brave' here does not suggest courage but rather magnificence and completeness — the full, uncompromised clarity of love at its peak. The phrase captures the ideal state of mature love: not just clear, but splendidly, brilliantly clear — nothing hidden, nothing disguised.

Additional Notes for Students

Metaphysical Conceit

This poem is a model example of the metaphysical conceit. A conceit is an extended metaphor that draws a surprising and intellectually demanding comparison between two very different things — here, between the movement of shadows across a day and the emotional arc of a love relationship. The conceit is not merely decorative: it is the vehicle through which the poem's entire argument is made. Without the shadow image, the poem has no structure; the shadow IS the argument. This is characteristic of Donne: the image and the idea are inseparable.

Structure and Form

The poem has 26 lines and is written in loose iambic pentameter with some variations. It can be divided into three sections: lines 1–13 (morning — the shadows of concealment from others, and the arrival at noon); lines 14–21 (afternoon — the warning about shadows of mutual deception if love declines); and lines 22–26 (the conclusion — the epigrammatic summary of love as light, and the warning that after noon comes night). The final couplet ('Love is a growing, or full constant light; / And his first minute, after noone, is night') is one of the most celebrated closing epigrams in English poetry, delivering the poem's philosophical argument with crisp, geometric finality.