CORE PAPER IX - FEMINIST WRITING

Hours: 6

Credits: 5

UNIT I POETRY

1. SupataBhatttacharya -Draupadi
2. Edna St.Vincent Millay -An Ancient Gesture
3. Gladys Cardiff -Combing
4. Julie Alvarez -Women's Work
5. Prathiba Nandakumar -Poem

Draupadi

Sutapa Bhattacharya

Sutapa Bhattacharya (b. 1942) is a Bengali poet and a professor at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal. Her published works in Bengali include *Anya Parichay* and *Du Phota Ator*.

'Draupadi', originally written in Bengali, is a retelling of the story of the princess heroine of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* from her own point of view. The eponymous narrator is the wife of the five Pandavas—Yudhishthira, Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Born out of a ritualistic fire meant to bless the king of Panchala with a son, Draupadi is known as the daughter of Fire. She is therefore considered to have the strength and passion of fire. The poem tells the story of Draupadi's suffering and the wrongs perpetrated against her, and in the process questions the heroism of the Pandavas by bringing to light their treatment of her. In casting Draupadi as the central figure and narrator of her much ignored story, the poet adopts a feminist stance and gives a vibrant and strong character a chance to present her side of the story.

Love was the single fault
therefore I fell first of all!
I spend five nights in five rooms
all of them demand my labour, service, body
not my love.
Even he has his own Subhadra, Ulupi, Chitrangada,–
each flower bloomed in a different Spring.

I am of no Spring, I am fire's daughter.
My unbound hair, become a thousand serpents, fills the air
with poison;

in my eyes' desolate heat forest fires burn, a hundred
saplings fall to ashes;

Yet there is no fault in that, such is the ruling!

Still, well and good, may your heaven remain yours;
with the one grave sin – which is my greatest virtue –
I will go with a smiling face towards hell.

Translated from the original Bengali by Marian Maddern

Glossary

labour:	hard work
Subhadra:	a character in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*; the younger sister of Krishna and Balarama; wife of Arjuna
Ulupi:	a character in the *Mahabharata*; the daughter of Kouravya, the king of serpents, she was the second among the four wives of Arjuna
Chitrangada:	a character in the *Mahabharata*; she was the daughter of the king of Manipur, Chitrabahana, and one of Arjuna's wives
bloomed:	flowered or grew
serpent:	snake
desolate:	great unhappiness or loneliness
saplings:	small, young trees
ashes:	the powdery residue left after the burning of a substance
ruling:	an authoritative decision or pronouncement
virtue:	goodness or righteousness of character

An Ancient Gesture

By

Edna St. Vincent Millay

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR

Millay was born in Rockland, Maine, to Cora LounellaBuzelle, a nurse, and Henry TolmanMillay, a schoolteacher who would later become a superintendent of schools. Her middle name derives from St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, where her uncle's life had been saved just before her birth. Cora and her three daughters, Edna (who called herself "Vincent"), Norma Lounella (born 1893), and Kathleen Kalloch (born 1896), moved from town to town, living in poverty and surviving various illnesses. Cora travelled with a trunk full of classic literature, including Shakespeare and Milton, which she read to her children. Those readings inspired Millay to become a writer and poet.

An Ancient Gesture

By

Edna St. Vincent Millay

TEXT

I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:

Penelopedid this too.

And more than once: you can't keep weaving all day

And undoing it all through the night;

Your arms get tired, and the back of your neck gets tight;

And along towards morning, when you think it will never be light,

And your husband has been gone, and you don't know where, for years.

Suddenly you burst into tears;

There is simply nothing else to do.

And I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:

This is an ancient gesture, authentic, antique,

In the very best tradition, classic, Greek;

Ulysses did this too.

But only as a gesture,—a gesture which implied

To the assembled throng that he was much too moved to speak.

He learned it from Penelope…

Penelope, who really cried.

REFERENCE

1. Odysseus, Latin **Ulixes**, English Ulysses, hero of Homer's epic poem the Odyssey and one of the most frequently portrayed figures in Western literature. According to Homer, Odysseus was king of Ithaca, son of Laertes and Anticleia (the daughter of Autolycus of Parnassus), and father, by his wife, **Penelope**, of **Telemachus**.

2. In Homer's *Odyssey*, **Penelope** (/pəˈnɛləpiː/ *pə-NEL-ə-pee*;) is the wife of Odysseus, who is known for her fidelity to Odysseus while he was absent, despite having many suitors. Her name has therefore been traditionally associated with marital fidelity
3. When **Helen** was kidnapped by **Paris** of **Troy**, the Oath of **Tyndareus** was invoked and everyone was summoned to fight against the Trojans; **Penelope** had just given birth to **Odysseus**' son, **Telemachus**, but **Odysseus** was forced to leave in order to honour his pledge. The **Trojan War** lasted ten years, and it took **Odysseus** another ten to reach his homeland, **Ithaca**. When he arrived, he disguised himself as a beggar, to test whether his wife had remained faithful to him.

A line by line analysis of the poem: Edna St.Vincent Millay -An Ancient Gesture

I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron… The image of a woman wearing an apron makes the reader of kitchens and cooking, perhaps she wipes her eyes on her apron because she is chopping onions that make her eyes water.

Penelope did this too…. is a character of the Odyssey, an epic poem by the Greek philosopher, Homer. Penelope is the wife of the main character, king Ulysses. She waits twenty years for him to return from Trojan War, and struggles with the temptation of several marriage proposals from different princes in his absence. The four simple words can be so emotive if you know the story of Penelope and Ulysses. “Penelope did this too,” brings an image of the Spartan woman looking out across the Mediterranean scanning the horizon for the ship that would carry her husband back to her, worrying about whether he was even yet alive, and what‘s more, was he remaining as faithful to her love as she was to his, and wiping her pining tears with a piece of fabric.

And more than once: you can't keep weaving all day…

And undoing it all through the night; …weaving: to create fabric, an ancient textile art and craft that turns thread or yarn into fabric by means of a loom. Penelope told her perspective suitors that she would not marry them until the tapestry she was weaving was complete, and she would weave all day long, and then undo the threads all night, to stall their persistant pleas for her hand, because she was faithful heart and soul to Ulysses. There is a second implication in relation to one’s emotions. If a person’s emotions are weaving back and forth, they are unsuccessfully trying to weigh thoughts; possibilities in their mind, not coming up with any answers. Millay likens what she is doing in the kitchen wearing her apron to the weaving that Penelope did.

Your arms get tired, and the back of your neck gets tight;… Certainly weaving all day would make one’s arms tired and neck tight, but any person who has worried or been stressed out can identify with that tightness in the back of their neck.

And along towards morning, when you think it will never be light,… before the computer age, those of us who suffer insomnia suffered it alone, sitting up, watching reruns of The Andy Griffith Show at 3:00 a.m. thinking that the sun would never rise.

And your husband has been gone, and you don't know where, for years… This line while a very telling line also clarifies the image Millay created of the woman in the apron, like Penelope, she waits on a spouse who has not come home, possibly cooking to pass the hours of worry, staring out her kitchen window at the empty street, waiting for the car to pull in, wiping her tears as she waits, wiping her eyes on her apron.

Odysseus was a man of strong will and determination throughout the Trojan War and the trials he endured at sea, but he demonstrates weakness and wavering resolve when he is faced with sexual temptation. For example, when enticed by Circe to "mingle and make love," he succumbs to her allure committing adultery against Penelope.

Suddenly you burst into tears;

There is simply nothing else to do.

And I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:

This is an ancient gesture, authentic, antique,

In the very best tradition, classic, Greek;

Ulysses did this too.

But only as a gesture,—a gesture which implied

To the assembled throng that he was much too moved to speak.

He learned it from Penelope...

Penelope, who really cried…. The last stanza is a strong statement, which implies that Ulysses pretended to be moved to tears, in order to avoid addressing the assemblage of people, but his were crocodile tears, whereas Penelope had really wept in worry and fear, faithfully waiting twenty years for her husband to return. Millay's careful choice of these two characters gives an intimate portrait of her fears about her relationship with her own husband, and makes this poem so much more than an account of a woman wiping her eyes with her apron.

GLADYS CARDIFF

A member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, Gladys Cardiff was born in Browning, Montana, and grew up in Seattle, Washington. Her mother was of Irish and Welsh descent, her father a member of the Owl clan of the North Carolina Cherokee. Cardiff received an MFA from the University of Washington, where she studied with the poet Theodore Roethke, and a PhD in literature from Western Michigan University.

Cardiff's collections of poetry are To Frighten a Storm (1976), winner of the Washington State Governor's First Book Award, and A Bare Unpainted Table (1999). Her poems have been anthologized in From the Belly of the Shark (1973), Carriers of the Dream Wheel (1981), Songs from This Earth on the Turtle's Back (1983), Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry (1988), and Reinventing the Enemy's Language (1998). She has received prizes from the Seattle Arts Commission and currently teaches at Oakland University in Michigan.

OTHER POEMS BY GLADYS CARDIFF

Combing

Prayer to Fix the Affections

To Frighten a Storm

COMBING

BY GLADYS CARDIFF

Bending, I bow my head
and lay my hands upon
her hair, combing, and think
how women do this for
each other. My daughter's hair
curls against the comb,
wet and fragrant— orange
parings. Her face, downcast,
is quiet for one so young.

I take her place. Beneath
my mother's hands I feel
the braids drawn up tight
as piano wires and singing,
vinegar-rinsed. Sitting
before the oven I hear
the orange coils tick
the early hour before school.

She combed her grandmother
Mathilda's hair using
a comb made out of bone.
Mathilda rocked her oak wood
chair, her face downcast,

intent on tearing rags

in strips to braid a cotton

rug from bits of orange

and brown. A simple act

Preparing hair. Something

women do for each other,

plaiting the generations.

Analysis:

"Combing" by Gladys Cardiff is a poem about how women helped each other at all times. In the first stanza the author grabs her daughters hair ready to make a braid in her hair. Then, she describes how her daughters hair curls against the comb. After that, she says that her daughters face was down, and that was strange for a person so young. In the second stanza, it is as if the daughter is the one who wrote it. She says that she feels her mother braiding her hair and that the braids are really tight against her head. Also, she was seated near to the oven and she could hear it ticking before she went to school. In the third and last stanza, she says how she combed her grandmothers hair using a comb made out of bones while they were seating in rocking chairs made out of oak wood. She ends the poem by saying that it is one simple act that women due for each other that has gone through many generations.

WOMEN'S WORK

BY

JULIUA ALVAREZ

Julia Alvarez (born March 27, 1950) is a Dominican-American poet, novelist, and essayist. She rose to prominence with the novels How the García Girls Lost Their Accents (1991), In the Time of the Butterflies (1994), and Yo! (1997). Her publications as a poet include Homecoming (1984) and The Woman I Kept to Myself (2004), and as an essayist the autobiographical compilation Something to Declare (1998). Many literary critics regard her to be one of the most significant Latina writers and she has achieved critical and commercial success on an international scale.

Julia Alvarez has also written several books for younger readers. Her first picture book for children was "The Secret Footprints" published in 2002. Alvarez has gone on to write several other books for young readers, including the "Tía Lola" book series.[3]

Born in New York, she spent the first ten years of her childhood in the Dominican Republic, until her father's involvement in a political rebellion forced her family to flee the country. Many of Alvarez's works are influenced

by her experiences as a Dominican in the United States, and focus heavily on issues of assimilation and identity. Her cultural upbringing as both a Dominican and an American is evident in the combination of personal and political tone in her writing. She is known for works that examine cultural expectations of women both in the Dominican Republic and the United States, and for rigorous investigations of cultural stereotypes. In recent years, Alvarez has expanded her subject matter with works such as 'In the Name of Salomé (2000)', a novel with Cuban rather than solely Dominican characters and fictionalized versions of historical figures.

In addition to her successful writing career, Alvarez is the current writer-in-residence at Middlebury College.

WOMEN'S WORK

BY

JULIUA ALVAREZ

Who says a woman's work isn't high art?

She'd challenge as she scrubbed the bathroom tiles.

Keep house as if the address were your heart.

We'd clean the whole upstairs before we'd start

downstairs, I'd sigh, hearing my friends outside.

Doing her woman's work was a hard art.

to practice when the summer sun would bar

the floor I swept till she was satisfied.

She kept me prisoner in her housebound heart.

She's shine the tines of forks, the wheels of carts,

cut lacy lattices for all her pies.

Her woman's work was nothing less than art.

And I, her masterpiece since I was smart,

was primed, praised, polished, scolded and advised

to keep a house much better than my heart.

I did not want to be her counterpart!

I struck out...but became my mother's child:

a woman working at home on her art,

housekeeping paper as if it were her heart.

ANALYSIS

This poem reveals just how hard it is to be a woman keeping house. People sometimes forget that just because a woman's husband leaves the house to "bring home the bacon", that she just sits around in a bathrobe, eating bon-bons and watching soap operas. Okay, so maybe that mental picture is a bit of a cliché, but you get the idea. The woman has it easy, while the men have it rough. It was someone who said: "A woman's work is never done." Today, even though women make up a significant portion of the workforce, there is still a need to make sure the house is in order. There is a growing number of "Mr. Moms", men who stay home to take care of the house and the kids, but tradition and history still tell us that society looks to the women to fulfill these needs.

It is hard work taking care of a house---laundry, dinner, vacuuming, dishes---and that's just the short list. The speaker in the poem is a young girl, helping her mother clean the house. The young girl is frustrated; she'd rather be outside, enjoying her childhood. She is kept in her mother's prison, made to

sweep the floor until she gains approval. The mother is repeating the cycle by teaching her daughter to clean at such an early age. This could be construed as part of a culture that is not to be questioned by the young. In other words, mother knows what's best. Toward the end, the young girl is determined not to have the same fate as her mother. However, she came out the same way, focusing on her art at home.

This woman is a subservient wife, paying more attention to cleaning a house instead of keeping her own heart. The husband is not mentioned anywhere is the poem, suggesting that he is elsewhere. His wife spends all of her time cleaning, while he is probably at work. There is no indication that she is happy or even content in her position of the household.

This idea that a woman is to be treated like a second class citizen in her own home should cease now. Today, a woman is capable of doing both, balancing her family and her career. I realize that there are still some people who believe that a woman's place is at home, keeping house and raising the children. Of course there is nothing wrong with this---but that position should be given respect and that person treated as an equal in the home.

Born in 1950s New York City to Dominican parents, Julia Alvarez has contributed several poems and novels to the literary community. Her other works include: How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, In the Time of Butterflies, and The Other Side/El OtroLado. In her success as a writer and a poet, Alvarez has used her advantage as a Dominican-American to provide a different perspective. Her cultural upbringing shows presence in works like “Woman’s Work.”

POEM

BY

PRATHIBA NANDAKUMAR

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR

Prathibha Nandakumar is a leading Kannada poet, journalist, film maker, columnist, and translator. Her publications include 14 collections of poems, two collections of short stories, three biographies, and one autobiography. She has also published poems in English and has translated from English and Dogri. She has received several awards including the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Book Award (2014), Mahadevi Verma Kavya Samman (2003), and Hoogar Memorial Award for Journalism (2006). She was a Sahitya Akademi delegate to China (2009), a member of the writers' delegation to Sweden (1997), and was invited to present her work at Asian Writers' Conference, Helisinki, Finland (1998)

POEM

BY

PRATHIBA NANDAKUMAR

When I was grouping for new poem
for the poetry festival,
poems danced all over the house:
in nooks and corners, in bed,
in boxes, in walls and curtains,
in windows and doors
poems beckoned with their hands.
They simmered on the stove
in the rasam pot, got flattened
under the rolling pins
on the chapati stone
and diced on the knife-stand
they boiled in the cooker
with salt and spices,
sautéed, smelling fragrant.

In the hall they were lying about begging to be picked up.
If I swept them, they asked to be
mopped; if I mopped them,
they wanted to be dressed,
stubborn pests, thorns

in my flesh.
Curtains where little hands
had wiped themselves,
torn books, sandal dropped,
chairs and tables pulled here and there,
cloths strewn on the floor
took on the shapes of poems
and dazzled my eyes.

When I cleared the mess
and sat down to rest,
one of them pestered me
asking me now to wash it,
now to give it a drink,
now to come play with it.

When at last I sat down to write
not one letter got written
and my brain was in a fog.
Late at night, when a sleepy hand
groped and hugged me
'to hell with the poem' I said
and fell asleep.
But it tickled me in a dream,
made me laugh and charmed me.
When I read that

in the poetry festival,

it ran out, refused to come back,

went inside the listeners and sat there.

I let it sit there

and returned home alone.

(Translated from the original Kannada into English by A K Ramanujan)

Unit-II Prose

Simon De Beauvior - Introduction to the Second Sex

Simone de Beauvoir (1908—1986)

INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir was one of the most preeminent French existentialist philosophers and writers. Working alongside other famous existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir produced a rich corpus of writings including works on ethics, feminism, fiction, autobiography, and politics.

Beauvoir's method incorporated various political and ethical dimensions. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she developed an existentialist ethics that condemned the "spirit of seriousness" in which people too readily identify with certain abstractions at the expense of individual freedom and responsibility. In *The Second Sex*, she produced an articulate attack on the fact that throughout history women have been relegated to a sphere of "immanence," and the passive acceptance of roles assigned to them by society. In *The Mandarins*, she fictionalized the struggles of existents trapped in ambiguous social and personal relationships at the closing of World War II. The emphasis on freedom, responsibility, and ambiguity permeate all of her works and give voice to core themes of existentialist philosophy.

Her philosophical approach is notably diverse. Her influences include French philosophy from Descartes to Bergson, the phenomenology

of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, the historical materialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and the idealism of Immanuel Kant and G. W. F Hegel. In addition to her philosophical pursuits, de Beauvoir was also an accomplished literary figure, and her novel, *The Mandarins*, received the prestigious *Prix Goncourt* award in 1954. Her most famous and influential philosophical work, *The Second Sex* (1949), heralded a feminist revolution and remains to this day a central text in the investigation of women's oppression and liberation.

The Second Sex

by Simone de Beauvoir (1949)

Introduction Chapter
Woman as Other

FOR a long time, I have hesitated to write a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women, really? Most assuredly the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: 'Even in Russia women still are women'; and other erudite persons – sometimes the very same – say with a sigh: 'Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.' One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be. 'What has become of women?' was asked recently in an ephemeral magazine.

But first we must ask: what is a woman? 'Totamulier in utero', says one, 'woman is a womb'. But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognising the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half

of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a Platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination? Is a rustling petticoat enough to bring it down to earth? Although some women try zealously to incarnate this essence, it is hardly patentable. It is frequently described in vague and dazzling terms that seem to have been borrowed from the vocabulary of the seers, and indeed in the times of St Thomas it was considered an essence as certainly defined as the somniferous virtue of the poppy

But conceptualism has lost ground. The biological and social sciences no longer admit the existence of unchangeably fixed entities that determine given characteristics, such as those ascribed to woman, the Jew, or the Negro. Science regards any characteristic as a reaction dependent in part upon a *situation*. If today femininity no longer exists, then it never existed. But does the word *woman*, then, have no specific content? This is stoutly affirmed by those who hold to the philosophy of the enlightenment, of rationalism, of nominalism; women, to them, are merely the human beings arbitrarily designated by the word *woman*. Many American women particularly are prepared to think that there is no longer any place for woman as such; if a backward individual still takes herself for a woman, her friends advise her to be psychoanalysed and thus get rid of this obsession. In regard to a work, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, which in other respects has its irritating features, Dorothy Parker has written: 'I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman ... My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings.' But nominalism is a rather inadequate doctrine, and the antifeminists have had

no trouble in showing that women simply *are* not men. Surely woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual. To decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the black soul, the Jewish character, is not to deny that Jews, Negroes, women exist today – this denial does not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality. Some years ago a well-known woman writer refused to permit her portrait to appear in a series of photographs especially devoted to women writers; she wished to be counted among the men. But in order to gain this privilege she made use of her husband's influence! Women who assert that they are men lay claim none the less to masculine consideration and respect. I recall also a young Trotskyite standing on a platform at a boisterous meeting and getting ready to use her fists, in spite of her evident fragility. She was denying her feminine weakness; but it was for love of a militant male whose equal she wished to be. The attitude of defiance of many American women proves that they are haunted by a sense of their femininity. In truth, to go for a walk with one's eyes open is enough to demonstrate that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that they do most obviously exist.

If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question "what is a woman"?

To state the question is, to me, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define

myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: 'You think thus and so because you are a woman'; but I know that my only defence is to reply: 'I think thus and so because it is true,' thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: 'And you think the contrary because you are a man', for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. 'The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities,' said Aristotle; 'we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.' And St Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an 'imperfect man', an 'incidental' being. This is symbolised in Genesis where Eve is depicted as

made from what Bossuet called ‘a supernumerary bone’ of Adam.

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Michelet writes: ‘Woman, the relative being …’ And Benda is most positive in his *Rapport d’Uriel*: ‘The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting in significance by itself … Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man.’ And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.’

The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality – that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts. It is revealed in such works as that of Granet on Chinese thought and those of Dumézil on the East Indies and Rome. The feminine element was at first no more involved in such pairs as Varuna-Mitra, Uranus-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between Good and Evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer. Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought.

Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile ‘others’ out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are ‘strangers’ and

suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners'; Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged.

Lévi-Strauss, at the end of a profound work on the various forms of primitive societies, reaches the following conclusion: 'Passage from the state of Nature to the state of Culture is marked by man's ability to view biological relations as a series of contrasts; duality, alternation, opposition, and symmetry, whether under definite or vague forms, constitute not so much phenomena to be explained as fundamental and immediately given data of social reality.' These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.

But the other consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim. The native travelling abroad is shocked to find himself in turn regarded as a 'stranger' by the natives of neighbouring countries. As a matter of fact, wars, festivals, trading, treaties, and contests among tribes, nations, and classes tend to deprive the concept *Other* of its absolute sense and to make manifest its relativity; willy-nilly, individuals and groups are forced to realize the reciprocity of their relations. How is it, then, that this reciprocity has not been recognised between the sexes, that one of the contrasting terms is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative and defining the latter as pure otherness? Why is it that women do not dispute male sovereignty? No subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed

as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view. Whence comes this submission in the case of woman?

There are, to be sure, other cases in which a certain category has been able to dominate another completely for a time. Very often this privilege depends upon inequality of numbers – the majority imposes its rule upon the minority or persecutes it. But women are not a minority, like the American Negroes or the Jews; there are as many women as men on earth. Again, the two groups concerned have often been originally independent; they may have been formerly unaware of each other's existence, or perhaps they recognised each other's autonomy. But a historical event has resulted in the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger. The scattering of the Jews, the introduction of slavery into America, the conquests of imperialism are examples in point. In these cases the oppressed retained at least the memory of former days; they possessed in common a past, a tradition, sometimes a religion or a culture.

The parallel drawn by Bebel between women and the proletariat is valid in that neither ever formed a minority or a separate collective unit of mankind. And instead of a single historical event it is in both cases a historical development that explains their status as a class and accounts for the membership of *particular individuals* in that class. But proletarians have not always existed, whereas there have always been women. They are women in virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change – it was not something that *occurred*. The reason why otherness in this case seems to be an absolute is in part that it lacks the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts. A condition brought about at a certain time can be abolished at some other time, as the Negroes of Haiti and others have proved: but it might seem that natural condition

is beyond the possibility of change. In truth, however, the nature of things is no more immutably given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. Proletarians say 'We'; Negroes also. Regarding themselves as subjects, they transform the bourgeois, the whites, into 'others'. But women do not say 'We', except at some congress of feminists or similar formal demonstration; men say 'women', and women use the same word in referring to themselves. They do not authentically assume a subjective attitude. The proletarians have accomplished the revolution in Russia, the Negroes in Haiti, the Indo-Chinese are battling for it in Indo-China; but the women's effort has never been anything more than a symbolic agitation. They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received.

The reason for this is that women lack concrete means for organising themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat. They are not even promiscuously herded together in the way that creates community feeling among the American Negroes, the ghetto Jews, the workers of Saint-Denis, or the factory hands of Renault. They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women. The proletariat can propose to massacre the ruling class, and a sufficiently fanatical Jew or Negro might dream of getting sole possession of the atomic bomb and making humanity wholly Jewish or black; but woman cannot even dream of exterminating the males. The bond that unites her to her

oppressors is not comparable to any other. The division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. Male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it. The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. Here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the Other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another.

One could suppose that this reciprocity might have facilitated the liberation of woman. When Hercules sat at the feet of Omphale and helped with her spinning, his desire for her held him captive; but why did she fail to gain a lasting power? To revenge herself on Jason, Medea killed their children; and this grim legend would seem to suggest that she might have obtained a formidable influence over him through his love for his offspring. In *Lysistrata* Aristophanes gaily depicts a band of women who joined forces to gain social ends through the sexual needs of their men; but this is only a play. In the legend of the Sabine women, the latter soon abandoned their plan of remaining sterile to punish their ravishers. In truth woman has not been socially emancipated through man's need – sexual desire and the desire for offspring – which makes the male dependent for satisfaction upon the female.

Master and slave, also, are united by a reciprocal need, in this case economic, which does not liberate the slave. In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grasp the power of satisfying this need through his own action; whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, his hope and fear, is quite conscious of the need he has for his master. Even if the need is at bottom equally urgent for both, it always works in favour of the oppressor and against the oppressed. That is why the liberation of the working class, for example, has been slow.

Now, woman has always been man's dependant, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognised in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores. In the economic sphere men and women can almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolise the most important posts. In addition to all this, they enjoy a traditional prestige that the education of children tends in every way to support, for the present enshrines the past – and in the past all history has been made by men. At the present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men – they have no doubt of it at all and women have scarcely any. To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal – this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence; thus she can evade at once both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance. Indeed, along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing. This is an inauspicious road, for he who takes it – passive, lost, ruined – becomes henceforth the creature of another's will, frustrated in his transcendence and deprived of every value. But it is an easy road; on it one avoids the strain involved in undertaking an authentic existence. When man makes of woman the Other, he may, then, expect to manifest deep-seated tendencies towards complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the

status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other.

But it will be asked at once: how did all this begin? It is easy to see that the duality of the sexes, like any duality, gives rise to conflict. And doubtless the winner will assume the status of absolute. But why should man have won from the start? It seems possible that women could have won the victory; or that the outcome of the conflict might never have been decided. How is it that this world has always belonged to the men and that things have begun to change only recently? Is this change a good thing? Will it bring about an equal sharing of the world between men and women?

These questions are not new, and they have often been answered. But the very fact that woman ***is the Other*** tends to cast suspicion upon all the justifications that men have ever been able to provide for it. These have all too evidently been dictated by men's interest. A little-known feminist of the seventeenth century, Poulain de la Barre, put it this way: 'All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit.' Everywhere, at all times, the males have displayed their satisfaction in feeling that they are the lords of creation. 'Blessed be God ... that He did not make me a woman,' say the Jews in their morning prayers, while their wives pray on a note of resignation: 'Blessed be the Lord, who created me according to His will.' The first among the blessings for which Plato thanked the gods was that he had been created free, not enslaved; the second, a man, not a woman. But the males could not enjoy this privilege fully unless they believed it to be founded on the absolute and the eternal; they sought to make the fact of their supremacy into a right. 'Being men, those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into principles', to quote Poulain de la Barre once more.

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. In the legends of Eve and Pandora men have taken up arms against women. They have made use of philosophy and theology, as the quotations from Aristotle and St Thomas have shown. Since ancient times satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women. We are familiar with the savage indictments hurled against women throughout French literature. Montherlant, for example, follows the tradition of Jean de Meung, though with less gusto. This hostility may at times be well founded, often it is gratuitous; but in truth it more or less successfully conceals a desire for self-justification. As Montaigne says, 'It is easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other'. Sometimes what is going on is clear enough. For instance, the Roman law limiting the rights of woman cited 'the imbecility, the instability of the sex' just when the weakening of family ties seemed to threaten the interests of male heirs. And in the effort to keep the married woman under guardianship, appeal was made in the sixteenth century to the authority of St Augustine, who declared that 'woman is a creature neither decisive nor constant', at a time when the single woman was thought capable of managing her property. Montaigne understood clearly how arbitrary and unjust was woman's appointed lot: 'Women are not in the wrong when they decline to accept the rules laid down for them, since the men make these rules without consulting them. No wonder intrigue and strife abound.' But he did not go so far as to champion their cause.

It was only later, in the eighteenth century, that genuinely democratic men began to view the matter objectively. Diderot, among others, strove to show that woman is, like man, a human being. Later John Stuart Mill came fervently to her defence. But these philosophers displayed unusual impartiality. In the nineteenth century the feminist quarrel became again a quarrel of partisans. One of the

consequences of the industrial revolution was the entrance of women into productive labour, and it was just here that the claims of the feminists emerged from the realm of theory and acquired an economic basis, while their opponents became the more aggressive. Although landed property lost power to some extent, the bourgeoisie clung to the old morality that found the guarantee of private property in the solidity of the family. Woman was ordered back into the home the more harshly as her emancipation became a real menace. Even within the working class the men endeavoured to restrain woman's liberation, because they began to see the women as dangerous competitors – the more so because they were accustomed to work for lower wages.

In proving woman's inferiority, the anti-feminists then began to draw not only upon religion, philosophy, and theology, as before, but also upon science – biology, experimental psychology, etc. At most they were willing to grant 'equality in difference' to the other sex. That profitable formula is most significant; it is precisely like the 'equal but separate' formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes. As is well known, this so-called equalitarian segregation has resulted only in the most extreme discrimination. The similarity just noted is in no way due to chance, for whether it is a race, a caste, a class, or a sex that is reduced to a position of inferiority, the methods of justification are the same. 'The eternal feminine' corresponds to 'the black soul' and to 'the Jewish character'. True, the Jewish problem is on the whole very different from the other two – to the anti-Semite the Jew is not so much an inferior as he is an enemy for whom there is to be granted no place on earth, for whom annihilation is the fate desired. But there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro. Both are being emancipated today from a like paternalism, and the former master class wishes to 'keep them in their place' – that is, the place chosen for them. In both cases the former masters lavish more or less

sincere eulogies, either on the virtues of 'the good Negro' with his dormant, childish, merry soul – the submissive Negro – or on the merits of the woman who is 'truly feminine' – that is, frivolous, infantile, irresponsible the submissive woman. In both cases the dominant class bases its argument on a state of affairs that it has itself created. As George Bernard Shaw puts it, in substance, 'The American white relegates the black to the rank of shoeshine boy; and he concludes from this that the black is good for nothing but shining shoes.' This vicious circle is met with in all analogous circumstances; when an individual (or a group of individuals) is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he is inferior. But the significance of the verb *to be* must be rightly understood here; it is in bad faith to give it a static value when it really has the dynamic Hegelian sense of 'to have become'. Yes, women on the whole ***are*** today inferior to men; that is, their situation affords them fewer possibilities. The question is: should that state of affairs continue?

Many men hope that it will continue; not all have given up the battle. The conservative bourgeoisie still see in the emancipation of women a menace to their morality and their interests. Some men dread feminine competition. Recently a male student wrote in the *Hebdo-Latin*: 'Every woman student who goes into medicine or law robs us of a job.' He never questioned his rights in this world. And economic interests are not the only ones concerned. One of the benefits that oppression confers upon the oppressors is that the most humble among them is made to feel superior; thus, a 'poor white' in the South can console himself with the thought that he is not a 'dirty nigger' – and the more prosperous whites cleverly exploit this pride.

Similarly, the most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women. It was much easier for M. de Montherlant to think himself a hero when he faced women (and women chosen for his purpose) than when he was obliged to act the man among men – something many

women have done better than he, for that matter. And in September 1948, in one of his articles in the *Figaro littéraire*, Claude Mauriac – whose great originality is admired by all – could write regarding woman: 'We listen on a tone [*sic!*] of polite indifference ... to the most brilliant among them, well knowing that her wit reflects more or less luminously ideas that come from *us*.' Evidently the speaker referred to is not reflecting the ideas of Mauriac himself, for no one knows of his having any. It may be that she reflects ideas originating with men, but then, even among men there are those who have been known to appropriate ideas not their own; and one can well ask whether Claude Mauriac might not find more interesting a conversation reflecting Descartes, Marx, or Gide rather than himself. What is really remarkable is that by using the questionable *we* he identifies himself with St Paul, Hegel, Lenin, and Nietzsche, and from the lofty eminence of their grandeur looks down disdainfully upon the bevy of women who make bold to converse with him on a footing of equality. In truth, I know of more than one woman who would refuse to suffer with patience Mauriac's 'tone of polite indifference'.

I have lingered on this example because the masculine attitude is here displayed with disarming ingenuousness. But men profit in many more subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman. Here is a miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility. Those who are not fear-ridden in the presence of their fellow men are much more disposed to recognise a fellow creature in woman; but even to these the myth of Woman, the Other, is precious for many reasons. They cannot be blamed for not cheerfully relinquishing all the benefits they derive from the myth, for they realize what they would lose in relinquishing woman as they fancy her to be, while they fail to realize what they have to gain from the woman of tomorrow. Refusal to pose oneself as the Subject, unique and absolute, requires

great self-denial. Furthermore, the vast majority of men make no such claim explicitly. They do not *postulate* woman as inferior, for today they are too thoroughly imbued with the ideal of democracy not to recognise all human beings as equals.

In the bosom of the family, woman seems in the eyes of childhood and youth to be clothed in the same social dignity as the adult males. Later on, the young man, desiring and loving, experiences the resistance, the independence of the woman desired and loved; in marriage, he respects woman as wife and mother, and in the concrete events of conjugal life she stands there before him as a free being. He can therefore feel that social subordination as between the sexes no longer exists and that on the whole, in spite of differences, woman is an equal. As, however, he observes some points of inferiority – the most important being unfitness for the professions – he attributes these to natural causes. When he is in a co-operative and benevolent relation with woman, his theme is the principle of abstract equality, and he does not base his attitude upon such inequality as may exist. But when he is in conflict with her, the situation is reversed: his theme will be the existing inequality, and he will even take it as justification for denying abstract equality.

So it is that many men will affirm as if in good faith that women are the equals of man and that they have nothing to clamour for, while *at the same time* they will say that women can never be the equals of man and that their demands are in vain. It is, in point of fact, a difficult matter for man to realize the extreme importance of social discriminations which seem outwardly insignificant but which produce in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to spring from her original nature. The most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman's concrete situation. And there is no reason to put much trust in the men when they rush to the defence of privileges whose full extent they can hardly measure. We shall not, then, permit ourselves to be intimidated by the number and

violence of the attacks launched against women, nor to be entrapped by the self-seeking eulogies bestowed on the 'true woman', nor to profit by the enthusiasm for woman's destiny manifested by men who would not for the world have any part of it.

We should consider the arguments of the feminists with no less suspicion, however, for very often their controversial aim deprives them of all real value. If the 'woman question' seems trivial, it is because masculine arrogance has made of it a 'quarrel'; and when quarrelling one no longer reasons well. People have tirelessly sought to prove that woman is superior, inferior, or equal to man. Some say that, having been created after Adam, she is evidently a secondary being: others say on the contrary that Adam was only a rough draft and that God succeeded in producing the human being in perfection when He created Eve. Woman's brain is smaller; yes, but it is relatively larger. Christ was made a man; yes, but perhaps for his greater humility. Each argument at once suggests its opposite, and both are often fallacious. If we are to gain understanding, we must get out of these ruts; we must discard the vague notions of superiority, inferiority, equality which have hitherto corrupted every discussion of the subject and start afresh.

Very well, but just how shall we pose the question? And, to begin with, who are we to propound it at all? Man is at once judge and party to the case; but so is woman. What we need is an angel – neither man nor woman – but where shall we find one? Still, the angel would be poorly qualified to speak, for an angel is ignorant of all the basic facts involved in the problem. With a hermaphrodite we should be no better off, for here the situation is most peculiar; the hermaphrodite is not really the combination of a whole man and a whole woman, but consists of parts of each and thus is neither. It looks to me as if there are, after all, certain women who are best qualified to elucidate the situation of woman. Let us not be misled by the sophism that because Epimenides was a Cretan he was necessarily a liar; it is not a mysterious

essence that compels men and women to act in good or in bad faith, it is their situation that inclines them more or less towards the search for truth. Many of today's women, fortunate in the restoration of all the privileges pertaining to the estate of the human being, can afford the luxury of impartiality – we even recognise its necessity. We are no longer like our partisan elders; by and large we have won the game. In recent debates on the status of women the United Nations has persistently maintained that the equality of the sexes is now becoming a reality, and already some of us have never had to sense in our femininity an inconvenience or an obstacle. Many problems appear to us to be more pressing than those which concern us in particular, and this detachment even allows us to hope that our attitude will be objective. Still, we know the feminine world more intimately than do the men because we have our roots in it, we grasp more immediately than do men what it means to a human being to be feminine; and we are more concerned with such knowledge. I have said that there are more pressing problems, but this does not prevent us from seeing some importance in asking how the fact of being women will affect our lives. What opportunities precisely have been given us and what withheld? What fate awaits our younger sisters, and what directions should they take? It is significant that books by women on women are in general animated in our day less by a wish to demand our rights than by an effort towards clarity and understanding. As we emerge from an era of excessive controversy, this book is offered as one attempt among others to confirm that statement.

But it is doubtless impossible to approach any human problem with a mind free from bias. The way in which questions are put, the points of view assumed, presuppose a relativity of interest; all characteristics imply values, and every objective description, so called, implies an ethical background. Rather than attempt to conceal principles more or less definitely implied, it is better to state them openly, at the beginning. This will make it unnecessary to specify on

every page in just what sense one uses such words as *superior, inferior, better, worse, progress, reaction*, and the like. If we survey some of the works on woman, we note that one of the points of view most frequently adopted is that of the public good, the general interest; and one always means by this the benefit of society as one wishes it to be maintained or established. For our part, we hold that the only public good is that which assures the private good of the citizens; we shall pass judgement on institutions according to their effectiveness in giving concrete opportunities to individuals. But we do not confuse the idea of private interest with that of happiness, although that is another common point of view. Are not women of the harem more happy than women voters? Is not the housekeeper happier than the working-woman? It is not too clear just what the word *happy* really means and still less what true values it may mask. There is no possibility of measuring the happiness of others, and it is always easy to describe as happy the situation in which one wishes to place them.

In particular those who are condemned to stagnation are often pronounced happy on the pretext that happiness consists in being at rest. This notion we reject, for our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the '*en-sois*' – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions – and of liberty into constraint and contingence. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects.

Now, what peculiarly signalises the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilise her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and for ever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as the essential and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfilment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome? These are the fundamental questions on which I would fain throw some light. This means that I am interested in the fortunes of the individual as defined not in terms of happiness but in terms of liberty.

Quite evidently this problem would be without significance if we were to believe that woman's destiny is inevitably determined by physiological, psychological, or economic forces. Hence I shall discuss first of all the light in which woman is viewed by biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. Next I shall try to show exactly how the concept of the 'truly feminine' has been fashioned – why woman has been defined as the Other – and what have been the consequences from man's point of view. Then from woman's point of view I shall describe the world in which women must live; and thus we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way as, endeavouring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto assigned them, they aspire to full membership in the human race.

Unit-III Drama

Susan Glaspell-Trifles

TRIFLES

A PLAY IN ONE-ACT

BY SUSAN GLASPELL

Susan Keating Glaspell (July 1, 1876 – July 28, 1948) was an American playwright, novelist, journalist and actress. With her husband George Cram Cook, she founded the Provincetown Players, the first modern American theatre company.

First known for her short stories (fifty were published), Glaspell is known also to have written nine novels, fifteen plays, and a biography. Often set in her native Midwest, these semi-autobiographical tales typically explore contemporary social issues, such as gender, ethics, and dissent, while featuring deep, sympathetic characters who make principled stands. Her 1930 play Alison's House earned her the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

After her husband's death in Greece, she returned to the United States with their children. During the Great Depression, Glaspell worked in Chicago for the Works Progress Administration, where she was Midwest Bureau Director of the Federal Theater Project. Although a best-selling author in her own time, after her death Glaspell attracted less interest and her books went out of print. She was also noted for discovering playwright Eugene O'Neill.

Since the late 20th century, critical reassessment of women's contributions has led to renewed interest in her career and a revival of her reputation. In the early 21st century Glaspell is today recognized as a pioneering feminist writer and America's first important modern female playwright. Her one-act play Trifles (1916) is frequently cited as one of the greatest works of American theatre. According to Britain's leading theatre critic, Michael Billington, she remains "American drama's best-kept secret."

TRIFLES

A PLAY IN ONE-ACT

BY SUSAN GLASPELL

CHARACTERS

GEORGE HENDERSON, County Attorney

HENRY PETERS, Sheriff

LEWIS HALE, A neighboring farmer

MRS. PETERS

MRS. HALE

[The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of JOHN WRIGHT, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the SHERIFF comes in followed by the COUNTY ATTORNEY and HALE. The SHERIFF and HALE are men in middle life, the COUNTY ATTORNEY is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the SHERIFF's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. MRS HALE is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (rubbing his hands) This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS PETERS: (after taking a step forward) I'm not—cold.

SHERIFF: (unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business) Now, Mr Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF: (looking about) It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us—no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove—and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF: Oh—yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy—I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today and as long as I went over everything here myself—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, Mr Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE: Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone.' I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Let's talk about that later, Mr Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE: I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, 'Come in.' I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door—this door (indicating the door by which the two women are still standing) and there in that rocker—(pointing to it) sat Mrs Wright.

[They all look at the rocker.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: What—was she doing?

HALE: She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of—pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And how did she—look?

HALE: Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How do you mean—queer?

HALE: Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE: Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, 'How do, Mrs Wright it's cold, ain't it?' And she said, 'Is it?'—and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, 'I want to see John.' And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: 'Can't I see John?' 'No', she says, kind o' dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. 'Yes', says she, 'he's home'. 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience. ''Cause he's dead', says she. 'Dead?' says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. 'Why—where is he?' says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that (himself pointing to the room above) I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, 'Why, what did he die of?' 'He died of a rope round his neck', says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might—need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE: Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked ... (stops, his face twitches) ... but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, 'No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything.' So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. 'Has anybody been notified?' I asked. 'No', says she unconcerned. 'Who did this, Mrs Wright?' said Harry. He said it business-like—and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. 'I don't know', she says. 'You don't

know?' says Harry. 'No', says she. 'Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?' says Harry. 'Yes', says she, 'but I was on the inside'. 'Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?' says Harry. 'I didn't wake up', she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, 'I sleep sound'. Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And what did Mrs Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE: She moved from that chair to this one over here (pointing to a small chair in the corner) and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me—scared, (the COUNTY ATTORNEY, who has had his notebook out, makes a note) I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr Lloyd came, and you, Mr Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (looking around) I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there, (to the SHERIFF) You're convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF: Nothing here but kitchen things.

[The COUNTY ATTORNEY, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Here's a nice mess.

[The women draw nearer.]

MRS PETERS: (to the other woman) Oh, her fruit; it did freeze, (to the LAWYER) She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF: Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE: Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[The two women move a little closer together.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (with the gallantry of a young politician) And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? (the women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place) Dirty towels! (kicks his foot against the pans under the sink) Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS HALE: (stiffly) There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet (with a little bow to her) I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. (He gives it a pull to expose its length again.)

MRS HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS HALE: (shaking her head) I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house—it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS HALE: I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr Henderson. And then—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Yes—?

MRS HALE: (looking about) It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No—it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS HALE: No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now. (He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.)

SHERIFF: I suppose anything Mrs Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mr Henderson.

[The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.]

MRS HALE: I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticising.

[She arranges the pans under sink which the LAWYER had shoved out of place.]

MRS PETERS: Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS HALE: Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. (gives the roller towel a pull) Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS PETERS: (who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan) She had bread set. (Stands still.)

MRS HALE: (eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it) She was going to put this in there, (picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things) It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. (gets up on the chair and looks) I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs Peters. Yes—here; (holding it toward the window) this is cherries, too. (looking again) I declare I believe that's the only one. (gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside) She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

[She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.]

MRS PETERS: Well, I must get those things from the front room closet, (she goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back) You coming with me, Mrs Hale? You could help me carry them.

[They go in the other room; reappear, MRS PETERS carrying a dress and skirt, MRS HALE following with a pair of shoes.]

MRS PETERS: My, it's cold in there.

[She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.]

MRS HALE: (examining the skirt) Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS PETERS: She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. (opens stair door and looks) Yes, here it is.

[Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.]

MRS HALE: (abruptly moving toward her) Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: Do you think she did it?

MRS PETERS: (in a frightened voice) Oh, I don't know.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS PETERS: (starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice) Mr Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS HALE: Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS PETERS: No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a—funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS HALE: That's just what Mr Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS PETERS: Mr Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or—sudden feeling.

MRS HALE: (who is standing by the table) Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here, (she puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy) It's wiped to here, (makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.) Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS PETERS: But Mrs Hale, the law is the law.

MRS HALE: I s'pose 'tis, (unbuttoning her coat) Better loosen up your things, Mrs Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

[MRS PETERS takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.]

MRS PETERS: She was piecing a quilt.

[She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.]

MRS HALE: It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

[Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The SHERIFF enters followed by HALE and the COUNTY ATTORNEY.]

SHERIFF: They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!

[The men laugh, the women look abashed.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (rubbing his hands over the stove) Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up. (The men go outside.)

MRS HALE: (resentfully) I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. (she sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision) I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS PETERS: (apologetically) Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

[Pulls up a chair and joins MRS HALE at the table.]

MRS HALE: (examining another block) Mrs Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

[After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant MRS HALE has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.]

MRS PETERS: Oh, what are you doing, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: (mildly) Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. (threading a needle) Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS PETERS: (nervously) I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS HALE: I'll just finish up this end. (suddenly stopping and leaning forward) Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS PETERS: Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. (MRS HALE starts to say something, looks at MRS PETERS, then goes on sewing) Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think, (putting apron and other things together) I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS HALE: In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS PETERS: (looking in cupboard) Why, here's a bird-cage, (holds it up) Did she have a bird, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: Why, I don't know whether she did or not—I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS PETERS: (glancing around) Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

MRS HALE: I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS PETERS: No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats—being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS HALE: My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS PETERS: (examining the cage) Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS HALE: (looking too) Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS PETERS: Why, yes.

[She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.]

MRS HALE: I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS PETERS: But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS HALE: It would, wouldn't it? (dropping her sewing) But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when she was here. I—(looking around the room)—wish I had.

MRS PETERS: But of course you were awful busy, Mrs Hale—your house and your children.

MRS HALE: I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—(shakes her head)

MRS PETERS: Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up.

MRS HALE: Not having children makes less work—but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS HALE: Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him—(shivers) Like a raw wind that gets to the bone, (pauses, her eye falling on the cage) I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS PETERS: I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it.]

MRS HALE: You weren't raised round here, were you? (MRS PETERS shakes her head) You didn't know—her?

MRS PETERS: Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS HALE: She—come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery. How—she—did—change. (silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things) Tell you what, Mrs Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS PETERS: Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here—and her things.

[They look in the sewing basket.]

MRS HALE: Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. (brings out a fancy box) What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give

you. Maybe her scissors are in here. (Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose) Why—(MRS PETERS bends nearer, then turns her face away) There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS PETERS: Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS HALE: (lifting the silk) Oh, Mrs Peters—it's—

[MRS PETERS bends closer.]

MRS PETERS: It's the bird.

MRS HALE: (jumping up) But, Mrs Peters—look at it! It's neck! Look at its neck! It's all—other side to.

MRS PETERS: Somebody—wrung—its—neck.

[Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside. MRS HALE slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter SHERIFF and COUNTY ATTORNEY. MRS PETERS rises.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries) Well ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS PETERS: We think she was going to—knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. (seeing the birdcage) Has the bird flown?

MRS HALE: (putting more quilt pieces over the box) We think the—cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (preoccupied) Is there a cat?

[MRS HALE glances in a quick covert way at MRS PETERS.]

MRS PETERS: Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (to SHERIFF PETERS, continuing an interrupted conversation) No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. (they start upstairs) It would have to have been someone who knew just the—

[MRS PETERS sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.]

MRS HALE: She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS PETERS: (in a whisper) When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—(covers her face an instant) If they hadn't held me back I would have—(catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly)—hurt him.

MRS HALE: (with a slow look around her) I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around, (pause) No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS PETERS: (moving uneasily) We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS HALE: I knew John Wright.

MRS PETERS: It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS HALE: His neck. Choked the life out of him.

[Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.]

MRS PETERS: (with rising voice) We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

MRS HALE: (her own feeling not interrupted) If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.

MRS PETERS: (something within her speaking) I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—

MRS HALE: (moving) How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

MRS PETERS: I know what stillness is. (pulling herself back) The law has got to punish crime, Mrs Hale.

MRS HALE: (not as if answering that) I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. (a look around the room) Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS PETERS: (looking upstairs) We mustn't—take on.

MRS HALE: I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing, (brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it) If I was you, I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it ain't. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She—she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS PETERS: (takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice) My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with—with—wouldn't they laugh!

[The men are heard coming down stairs.]

MRS HALE: (under her breath) Maybe they would—maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—

[The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter HALE from outer door.]

HALE: Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'm going to stay here a while by myself, (to the SHERIFF) You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF: Do you want to see what Mrs Peters is going to take in?

[The LAWYER goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. (Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back) No, Mrs Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Not—just that way.

SHERIFF: (chuckling) Married to the law. (moves toward the other room) I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (scoffingly) Oh, windows!

SHERIFF: We'll be right out, Mr Hale.

[HALE goes outside. The SHERIFF follows the COUNTY ATTORNEY into the other room. Then MRS HALE rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at MRS PETERS, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting MRS HALE's. A moment MRS HALE holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly MRS PETERS throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. MRS HALE snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter COUNTY ATTORNEY and SHERIFF.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (facetiously) Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS HALE: (her hand against her pocket) We call it—knot it, Mr Henderson.

CURTAIN

The play opens on the scene of an abandoned farmhouse. The house is in disarray, with various activities interrupted, such as dishes left unwashed and bread prepared but not yet baked. Five people arrive at the house to investigate the scene of a crime, including the county attorney, George Henderson, the local sheriff, **Henry Peters**, and the neighbor, **Lewis Hale**, who discovered a murdered man, **John Wright**, strangled with a rope in his bed. The men are accompanied by two of their wives, **Mrs. Peters** and **Mrs. Hale**. Mr. Hale describes for the

country attorney the experience of finding John Wright's dead body the previous day. He stopped by his neighbors' house to ask if they'd want to install a party line telephone. He encountered **Minnie Wright** sitting in her rocking chair, and she calmly announced that her husband was dead. Mr. Hale went upstairs to find the body, and left everything in place for the inspection of the attorney and the sheriff. Minnie claimed that she didn't wake up when her husband was strangled in their bed.

Mrs. Wright (Minnie) has been arrested for the crime and is being held until her trial. The men do not look closely around the kitchen for evidence of a motive, but discover Minnie's frozen and broken canning jars of fruits. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale know that Minnie was worried her canning jars would explode in the cold weather, and the sheriff jokes that a woman would worry about such things while held for murder. The men criticize Minnie's poor housekeeping, as evidenced by the mess in the kitchen and **a dirty towel**.

The men go upstairs to inspect the bedroom and Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale collect items from the kitchen that Minnie requested be brought to her at the jail, including clothes and an apron. The women comment on the strangeness of strangling a man to death when the men had pointed out that there was a gun in the house. The women admire **a quilt** that Minnie was working on, and are wondering if she was going to finish it by "quilting" or "knotting" when the men re-enter and, overhearing the women talking, joke about the women's trivial concerns at a time like this. Once again left alone by the men, the women notice that some of the stitching of the quilt is very poor, as if Minnie were nervous or upset.

The women then find a birdcage without any bird in it. Mrs. Hale expresses strong regrets having not come to visit Minnie more often, acknowledging that John Wright was a hard man and that it must have been very difficult for Minnie to be alone at her house. She recalls Minnie before she married and how cheerfully she sang in the choir. The women then uncover a beautiful red box, and in it, the dead bird that was missing from the birdcage, its neck broken.

When the men return, Mrs. Hale hides the box with the body of the bird. Once the men leave again, Mrs. Peters remembers a boy who killed her childhood pet kitten, and her certainty that she would have hurt him in return if she could have. And yet, Mrs. Peters says, "the law has got to punish crime." Mrs. Hale

berates herself for what she sees as her own crime of not visiting her neighbor Minnie, crying out, “who’s going to punish that crime?”

The men return, and the sheriff asks if the county attorney wants to take a look at the items Mrs. Peters is bringing to Minnie at the jail. He says that Mrs. Peters doesn’t need supervising and assumes the things she’s taking aren’t harmful. The women hide the box with the body of the bird. The county attorney jokes that at least they discovered the fate of Minnie’s quilt project, and Mrs. Hale reminds him that she was planning to finish the quilt by knotting it.

Mrs. Peters

The wife of the sheriff. Mrs. Peters is more timid than Mrs. Hale and more aware of the responsibilities the women have to the law and to their husbands when they uncover the truth of…

Mrs. Hale

The wife of the neighboring farmer. Mrs. Hale is wracked by guilt at not having visited Minnie Wright more often to support her through the difficulties of living with her unkind husband. She leads Mrs.…

Minnie Wright

The wife of the murdered John Wright, and his killer. Mrs. Hale remembers Minnie for her youthful innocence and happiness before she was married (when she was Minnie Foster). Back then, she sang joyfully…

George Henderson

The county attorney assigned to the case of John Wright’s murder. He is a young man with a self-assured attitude, confident that he’ll be able to find and present the evidence against Minnie Wright, and certain of her guilt.

Henry Peters

The local sheriff who accompanies George Henderson on his investigation. Although less vocal and bombastic than Henderson, Peters is equally prejudiced against and judgmental of women.

Lewis Hale

The neighboring farmer who discovered John Wright’s body. He recounts his tale of visiting the Wrights and describes Minnie Wright’s strange attitude as

she sat in her rocking chair and announced the death of her husband by strangulation.

John Wright

The deceased farmer. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters describe him as a good man because he did not drink and paid his debts, but a hard man. He was not considered good company, and the other women imagine the loneliness of Minnie's life as his wife.

Unit – IV Fiction

Anita Nair – Ladies Coupe

Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe is a daring exploration of the rebellious questions: Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete? Here Nair introduces Akhila, Akhilandesweri, her spokesperson and Akhila takes the readers to the mysterious corners of woman's life, to the most private moments of the lives of five women from the different strata of the society. As the train they travel rambles through the Indian countryside each woman tells her own story of childhood, marriage, lost liberties and unfilled love highlighting the grime circumstances she lives. There is not an overall happy story in the bunch. There is an exposition of women's predicaments in flesh and blood. It is apparent that the status of contemporary Indian women is the focus of this book and of general concern to Nair. This exposition gives a renewed out look to women about their lives and also renders a blow to male chauvinism. Hence, Nair's Ladies Coupe is an odyssey – an odyssey of women's plight and an assertion of their independent future. And this assertion holds the greater significance of Ladies Coupe in the study of feminism. The protagonist Akhila, an income-tax clerk is a frustrated spinster of 45 who has never been allowed to live her own life. She always has been the daughter, the sister, the aunt and the provider until the day she gets herself a one-way ticket to the seaside town of Kanyakumari. Finally, she boards the train to Kanyakumari gloriously alone for the first time in her 45 years of life, determined to break free and to discover her identity. In the intimate atmosphere of the ladies coupe, Akhila gets to know her

fellow travelers: Janaki, a pampered wife and a confused mother; Margaret Shanti, a chemistry teacher married to an insensitive tyrant too self-absorbed to recognize her needs; Prabha Devi, the perfect daughter and wife transformed for life by a glimpse of a swimming pool; fourteen-year-old Sheela with a remarkable ability to perceive what others cannot; and Marikolanthu, whose innocence was destroyed by one night's lust. They have nothing in common save their gender: some made happy marriages; some were not happy; one was raped and took her revenge, and another one seduced men much younger than herself. As Akhila listens to their stories, she is drawn into the most private and personal moments of their lives, to the hidden desires and aspirations of their real selves and to the working of their inner minds. It has been a startling insight and revelation to her of womanhood in reality. Thus Ladies Coupe portrays a panorama of the feminine world where so many and varied women of different strata are seen in flesh and blood as the victims of male-hypocrisy, exploitation and violence. Marikolunthu became 'the cook's daughter' when her mother became the cook in a rich merchant family, the Chettiar house following the death of her father. It was with the innocence, curiosity and excitement of a nine year old girl she enters the Chettiar house with her mother. She was intelligent and studious; still she had to put an end to her schooling in order to provide for the education of her two brothers. The entire hopes and expectations of parents are on their sons since the belief is that whatever is done for the girls will not come back; it will go to the in-laws.

LADIES COUPE MIND MAP

What are the main themes of Ladies Coupe?

Feminism is the most important theme for this book. The book follows the main character as she starts to embrace the fact that she does not need to be defined by specific gender roles. The book does not just touch on independence and freedom but change too. The change is in scenery just as much as it is in her internal thoughts.

What does the train represent?
Some people argue that the train journey represents Akhila's emotional journey. By the time she gets off the train at the other end, she is in just as much of a different place spiritually as she is physically.

Who do the 5 women on the train represent?
They represent the 5 extremities of what a woman's life could entail. From a pampered wife to an insensitive tyrant. From the perfect child to one without innocence. Never are any of these women portrayed as the wrong choice. Just different from her own.

What is Akhila's eternal dilemma?
Akhila expresses that her eternal dilemma is whether or not she needs a man to fulfill her. Does she need a man to complete her, or is happiness attainable as a single woman? This goes back to the theme of feminism.

What does Akhila ultimately learn?
Akhila learns so much about the other women's lives that she manages to see for herself how different choices might have affected her. Though she respects all of her conversation companions she does judge them. Not harshly, more observationally. She ultimately learns that she must think for herself not just follow the social norm. This again leads back to feminism.

What is Akhila's internal struggle?
Akhila worries that she has spent too long doing as others ask her. She feels she never got the chance to truly live her own life. She has always dutifully played the role of daughter, sister, aunt, but never wife. She wonders whether she has missed out on being someone's wife, or whether she would be better off alone.

Does Anita Nair think her book is about feminism?
Ultimately, no, she doesn't. She even states in her book that it is not about feminism. That it is just about how women must find their place in society. Regardless of what Anita Nair may think,

her book does have feminist connotations. The independence of women is a key part of the book. Anita's opinion matters, of course, but so does context. Whether it was her intention or not is irrelevant, Ladies Coupe is an important part of feminist literature.

The times:

- 1980'S Puraichi Thalaivar dies – the revolutionary leader, Chief Minister

The society:

- "All men want fair-skinned wives even if they are black as coal themselves." (p.51)

Major characters:

Akhila [Akhilandeswari] – main character

- Hindu (doesn't eat meat and eggs)
- 45 years old
- spinster
- does what is expected of her to do; she doesn't have an identity of her own
- her father dies (or commits suicide because he couldn't fit into his workplace – too honest) so Akhila has to provide for the family
- an organized person
- has always lived with and for her family
- Mandras – the town where Akhila lives
- takes a trip by train to Kanyakumari
- *Quo vadis?* Whither goest thou? (Where do you go?) – a recurring question / theme – symbolizes the need to escape
- has an affair with Hari, a man much younger than her; he wants to marry her but she refuses because she is afraid of what society will say
- she doesn't understand what is love; she feels the need to define it
- when she leaves Hari, she says "… this is not meant to be"(p.153); lost a good opportunities to have a happier life.

- Karpagam – an old school friend; she influences Akhila a lot; she convinces her to live alone, and do whatever she wants
- in Kanyakumari – a city by the sea, she has a one night stand with a young man. The day she leaves she calls Hari

Padama

- Akhila's sister
- married with 2 daughters
- lives in Akhila's house
- has a permanent conflict with Akhila

Katherine Webber

- a young Anglo-Indian girl
- Akhila's colleague at the income-tax department office and Akhila's only friend
- persuades Akhila to eat eggs (Akhila thought that to remove the fragments of the shell of an egg "must be the most pleasurable thing anyone could do" – p.87)

Passengers in the coupé (train compartment):

Janaki Prabhakar

- the eldest of them all
- travels with her husband
- married Prabhakar when she was 18; he was 27 at that time
- it was an arranged marriage
- her relationship with her husband is "friendly love"

Sheela Vasudevan

- attending the 9th grade at Holy Angels Convent
- travels with her father
- is the only one to understand her dying grandmother

Margaret Paulraj

- married to Ebenezer Paulraj (Ebe), now a fat man
- is a chemistry teacher (Head of Department of Chemistry) in the same school where her husband acts as principal
- for her, everything in life is compared to chemical elements
- Ebe – a narcissistic man; he cares only about his job and his career; he makes Margaret have an abortion; he thinks the

book called *The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner* (1959) by Alan Sillitoe is the best book ever written
- Margaret decides to make him fat, and thus subdues him

Prabha Devi

- the rich wife of Jagdeesh, the son of a prosperous diamond merchant
- loves swimming
- she visit New York; when she comes back she is changed for a while; imitates western women
- She is a proud person: "How lucky I am to be me." (p.179)
- She succeeds to stay afloat both in life and in the water

Marikolanthu

- 31 years old
- has a son but no husband
- works as a helper in a mission hospital
- was raped when 19; born a child which she rejected
- she worked in the Chettiar household, and the rapist was a member of the house

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Among the emerging writers, Anita Nair is the most promising and a writer to reckon with. Her maiden novel. The Better Man has placed her among the most self-conscious Indian novelists and her second novel, Ladies Coupe is in some ways even better than her first, though it is impossible to draw a parallel between the two since they are largely different. In Ladies Coupe Anita Nair deals with the concept of patriarchy and signifies a relationship of inequality. The story is an attempt to show how, in life, suppression and oppression do not always come in recognizable forms, but often under the guise of love, protection and the assurance of security. Though Patriarchy is a common concept in every woman's life, Anita Nair depicts carefully the diversity within each woman, as she did not want to put the lives of women to one ideal.

Ladies Coupe is the story of six women who meet in a train journey, just by chance. Akhilandeswari, the protagonist listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and gives her story too in bits, seeking in them a solution to the question that has troubled her all her life: Can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? The story switches over from past to present and present to past and hence, even other than the five women in the compartment, we are shown of certain women who are humiliated and debased. Sunita Sinha says, "Nair's India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in our traditional society but also imply the existence of an alternative reality".

Akhila is a forty-five years old spinster, who takes various roles of a daughter, sister, aunt and the provider of the family. As her father dies suddenly she takes the burden of the entire family on her young shoulders. As Indra Devi says, "Anita Nair probably hints at the family's easy acceptance of her as the head of the family on a place traditionally reserved for the patriarch in both the colonial and post-colonial periods". When Akhila sees a man in the railway station surrounded by a whole family of uncles, aunts, cousins and grand parents, she finds a parallel between him and her. "Akhila looked at the man who carried on his shoulders the burden of other people‟s dreams. That she knew all about. That she could understand" . As Narsi her brother became the first graduate and found a teaching job and Narayan the other brother joined the tank factory as a machinist, "Akhila felt the iron bands around her chest begin to loosen: Dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again? Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?" . Though she was the bread winner of the family, she was not considered as the head of the family and her needs and desires were least bothered. Since Narsi was a man he did not ask for anybody‟s permission to get married but "decided" to get married, "Narsi decided he wanted to get married". When he told the family that he was going to marry the principal's

daughter, “No one could fault with his choice and there was nothing anyone could say except perhaps – Don‟t you think you should wait for your elder sister to get married before you think of a wife and a family? But who was to mouth this rebuke?”. And both Narayan and Narsi had their weddings in the same hall, on the same day and time. Akhila waited for Amma or her brother’s to say something about her marriage but they never asked, “What about you?You‟ve been the head of this family ever since Appa died. Don’t you want a husband, children, a home of your own?”. Though Akhila had done her duties, as the head of a family to her brothers and sister, she was not recognized as the real head, just because she was a woman. Amma expected her to get permission from her brothers, the men of the family to go on an office tour as she says, “Perhaps you should ask your brothers for permission first”. When Akhila argued that she was their elder sister and why she should ask their permission Amma simply says, “You might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family”. Akhila‟s encounter with her school friend awakened her spirit to think of a life to live her own. But even then there sprouted the patriarchal domination.

When Akhila boldly told Padma about her decision to live alone, she without reluctance says, “Do you think the brothers will consent to this? Do you think they’ll let you live alone?”.

When Akhila says for her defiance, “For heaven’s sake, I don’t need anyone’s consent”, Padma mocked at her telling, “They are the men of the family”. Everyone including Padma, Narsi and Narayan were strongly rooted in the patriarchal structure and hence were unable to bear the thought of a woman living alone. But Akhila’s defiance was stronger than theirs that she boarded the train to Kanyakumari.

As we read the story of Margaret Shanthi, it is obvious how women are dominated by man-power. Men like Ebenezer Paulraj are like the colonizers who are unable to see and praise the worth of the women, who are like the colonized. She married Ebenezer Paulrajat her own choice and at the immediate willingness of her family. She was a Chemistry teacher

not an ordinary teacher but the one who had been a gold medalist. Initially Margaret did not understand the deep rooted male egoism in Ebenezer Paulraj, as her extreme love for him had made her blind. Though at times she felt the pain of it she convinced herself saying, “He was Ebe. My Ebe. He was right. He was always right”. As Indra Devi says, “She silences her aspirations in order to what Ebenezer wants her to be”. Ebe is simply a male chauvinist when he takes the power to ask Margaret to abort the baby off, the first baby off, when she conveyed him the good news with all happiness. Not only in that, but he continued to thrust upon his supremacy over her in deciding her higher studies, career and even simple things like choice of food and her hair dressing for he says, “What’s the point of working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. So you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn’t suit you. Cut it off. You’ll look nicer with your hair in a blunt bob”. She was so patient and gulped in all insults thrown by him on her but later woke up to the fact and planned her own strategy to prove her strength. As Ebe was becoming more and more egoistic, domineering and hypocritic, Margaret was unconsciously compelled to teach him a lesson. She was taken to the height of anger as Ebe started throwing insults on her in front of his favouritecoterie(small group of like-minded people, in this case his friends). When he said to the coterie “When I think of Chemistry, what comes to mind is the odour of rotten eggs” , the anger in her bubbled for she thought how he had turned the evening into another moment of triumph for himself. She thought, “all that was good and noble about my life that he had destroyed, the baby that died even before it had a soul…there was nothing left for me to dream of and the words rose to the surface again: I HATE HIM. I HATE HIM. What am I going to do? . She chose flattery as the weapon to bring down Ebe’s self esteem. She flattered and flattered and fed him with fatty food since dawn till night, till fat found its home on him, and turned him into a fat man, a quiet man and an easy man who sought her for food and coitus and every way she knew. As Dr.T.VaraLakshmi says, “By making him fat she erodes his self-esteem and feels he is an easy

man to live with now, in and out of health institute. Margaret gains self-esteem by eroding Ebe's self-esteem. She succeeds in achieving her emotional fulfillment keeping the family ties impact, though some justifications contain a modicum of sense". The character of Margaret shows that the woman could vanquish the domineering man.

The youngest of the six is Sheela, fourteen years old who talks of her maternal grandmother, in whom one could see the manifestations of feminity. Anita Nair has not only brought out the need to assert the individuality of the female selfhood but also finely brought out the issue of female child abuse through the character portrayal of Sheela. As Judes Jalaja and ShunmugaSundari observe, "Sheela's retrospection also touches on sexual abuse of girl children by older men". Sheela felt ashamed and hurt at the unwanted touching of Hasina's father Nazar as, "One Sunday afternoon when Sheela went to their house, rushing in from the heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lip, Nazar had reached forward and wiped it with his forefinger. The touch of his finger tingled on her skin for a long time". So Sheela was unable to open her mouth against the physical abuse attempted on her, but developed confidence to protect herself from it in future for it is said, "Thereafter Sheela mopped her face with a hanky each time she entered Hasina's home". Even Sheela's friend Hasina and her mother were able to understand the man's attempt to touch her unnecessarily but they were helpless. When once Nazar knotted the bows in her sleeves, "She saw the hurt in Hasina and her mother's eyes". Thereafter Sheela took the right decision that "She would never go to Hasina‟s house again", as a means of her self-protection. Thus Sheela was strong in her defiance against a man's abuse on her physique. Within Sheela's story Anita Nair has brought in an incident, where a girl named Celine became a victim to a man's instinct. Celine became pregnant because of her friend's father and her family moved to a place where no one would know about her abortion. But it is said, "the friend's father went to a faraway town where he would find plenty of young girls to ruin everyone

said" . Through this incident, Nair has brought out the unjust treatment of women by men.

As Suresh Kumar and Leema Rose say, "Patriarchy shows its ugly face from cradle to grave." Even parents are more concerned about the boys than the girls. And Anita Nair has chosen the character of Prabha Devi to emphasize this issue.
When Prabha Devi is born his father sighs, as it would be a hindrance for his business progress as he says, "Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans, addled your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance".
Even Prabha Devi's mother is pleased when a daughter is born as her thoughts are confined that a daughter is someone who will take her recipes to the other house and treasure her jewelry and someone who will say that she did this and that in her mother's house. Even while playing games as a child, a girl is destined to choose to play cooking or baby – sitting games as it is said, "A kitchen was set up for her to play house and mother games. Sometimes Prabha Devi's mother joined in her daughter's games, pretending to be an adult – child while her daughter tried hard to be a child adult". Basically, a woman is never liked to come out with opinions. PrabhaDevi's mother finds great pleasure in the company of her daughter than in her four sons put together. But she conceals it within her for "she had discovered that a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell, to be shunned". She swallows this thought as she has done all her life. Though Prabha Devi's childhood had been this way, in future she grooms herself as a woman who can measure up her life with difference. She doesn't want to define herself within a more mechanical and monotonous life of a homely wife and a mother. She is not satisfied with this life and craves for something more. Moreover escape Anita Nair, yet she displays a very real respect for her as she has done with every other woman. And Prabha Devi achieves the self - actualization by learning swimming on her own out of great desire. As T.Varalakshmi says, "She triumphs overher innate

timidity and gains, peak experience of supreme content bringing tremendous happiness to her husband as well".

Marikolanthu is the most pathetic woman among the six. She is the realistic picture of the humble and miserable peasantry women on whom male oppression is forced on heavily and left unquestioned. Even as a girl she is denied to be sent to the town school as her mother says, "It's not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself . . . . there is too much at risk" . To ensure her mother's fear, her childhood innocence is destroyed when Murugesan attempts physical brutality on her. When she is found, pregnant her mother and Sujata, regret it as they just feel it is too late to insist Murugesan to marry her. Her mother is least bothered about her feelings but worries that no one will marry her. Even when the matter is taken to the Chettiar's son Sridhar, he with little reluctance says, "The girl must have led him on and now that she is pregnant she's making up a story about rape". For her mother and Sujatha, a woman's life and protection lies in her husband, as Sujata says, "But if she has a job, that will replace a husband's protection". But Marikolanthu is able to raise the question within her about the so called "Husband's protection". She is sure that neither her mother nor Sujata had their husbands look out for them, but for them, "a fulfilled woman was one who was married". For Marikolanthu nothing is more cruel than a man raping a woman and so she finds little fault in the missy's love for each other and experiences a kind of content and happiness to give her love for Sujata, more than her husband did.Marikolanthu never wants to tie up her life with a husband. Till she is thirty – one she lives alone and wrestles with life, making a living of her own. She neither wants to rely upon her brothers nor wants a penny from Sujata or her husband but decides to make her living of her own, working as a servant maid in a house. She defines her as an independent woman. Her strong aversion for the physical brutality attempted on her, evokes a strong aversion for her son Muthu. But at the end she feels ashamed for having rejected him and even using him. As Indra

Devi observes, “In the end she decided to “measure happiness” as Muthu’s mother”.

Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex remarks: Just as he wants her to be at once warm and cool in bed, he requires her to be wholly his and yet no burden; he wishes her to establish him in a fixed place on the earth and to leave him free, to assume monotonous daily round and to bore him, to be always at hand and never importunate. He wants to have her all to himself and not to belong to her; to live as one of a couple and to remain alone. Thus she is betrayed from the day he marries her. In this context, Marriage has become the destiny usually offered to women by society. In India where arranged marriages are widely prevalent, the wife is all through her life forced to obey the whims and fancies of man. Janaki, on the other hand, is a pampered wife but confused mother. Janaki married Prabhakar when she was eighteen and he was twenty-seven. Janaki didn’t know what to expect of marriage. While talking to Akhila, Janaki says: I don’t know enough about the world or you to offer advice. All I can do is to tell you about myself, about my marriage and what it means to me”. “I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there was my father and my brothers; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son waiting to take off from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that we look down upon women who are strong and who can cope by themselves. Do you understand what I am saying? The words of Janaki shows clearly, how the slavery starts from home and why the women become tired of being a fragile creature. As Sunita Sinha says, Nair’s India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man’s patriarchal role in our traditional society but also imply the existence of an alternative reality.

Anita Nair has used the character of Karpagam to bring an awareness to the society of women‟s demands and their need for

self – expression. Karpagam is portrayed as a strong woman striving for self – definition in a patriarchal social organization. She is a widow but unlike other widows she wears the kumkum and colourful clothes. She is a courageous woman who breaks the shackles of patriarchy when she says, “I don‟t care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me didn‟t we as young girls wear colourful clothes and jewellery and a bottu? It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who made these laws anyway? Some man who couldn‟t bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continuedto be attractive to other men”. Her defiance is outstanding when she says, “I live alone. I have for many years now. We are strong, Akhi. Whatever you think you want to. Live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first”. More than any other woman, Karpagam and her words instill a strong desire to live a life of her choice as Akhila feels, “Karpagam are you real or are you some goddess who had come here to lead me out of this”. Thus Anita Nair portrays the character of Karpagam as one who courageously breaks the larger framework of patriarchy that denies personal freedom to women.

Anita Nair uses certain characters like Akhila’s mother, to express how women are strong conservatives of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on women. Akhila’s mother is a conservative and orthodox mother, a devoted wife with her own theory that a wife is always inferior to her husband. She is a sort of woman who never takes decision on her own but left all decisions to her husband for she believes, “He knows best”. According to her, “A goodwife learnt to put her husband’s interests before anyone else’s, even her father’s. A good wife listened to her husband and did as she said. It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is so much easier and simpler to accept one’s station in life and live accordingly”.
When Akhila wants her mother to take music lesson
as Karpagam’s mother teaches dance, She disapproves of it telling,

“I don’t approve of what Karpagam’s mother is doing”. She reminds Akhila what her father has told her when they were first married, “I want my wife to take care of my children and me. I don’t want her so caught up with her job that she has no time for the house or for taking care of my needs”. Even after the death of Akhila’s father, her mother lets her eldest daughter Akhila shoulder the responsibilities of the entire family, taking advantage over her sense of duty to keep them safe, secure and comfortable. Anita Nair brings in Sarasa mami’s family that faces a similar situation. As SubramaniIyer, Sarasa mami’s husband dies, Sarasa mami goes to every doorstep demanding to be taken as a servant – maid. But every neighborhood just gives her a handful of rice as if she is a beggar and this makes her sell her daughter Jaya for the sake of their living. Anita Nair chooses this family as a complete contrast of Akhila’s family to interpret how the moral dilemmas of women are trapped in social and emotional circumstances, struggling against oppression and destiny.

Listening to the lives of various women in the coupe Akhila gets down at Kanyakumari as an empowered woman to rediscover her “self”. The more she wants to get rid of her life she had lived for others, she desires more of her life, that is more of Hari and executes her decision to get reunited connected him over phone. Finally she succeeds in her defiance against patriarchy. She subverts the repressive forces of patriarchal ideas that have chained her not letting to discover her “self”.

Thus in the novel, Ladies Coupe, Anita Nair has presented an increasingly common concept of patriarchy in which a woman is constrained by tradition to be dependent on men, crippled to realize her own strength. She has presented her women struggling side by side because of patriarchy but at the end has given them a gesture of defiance against patriarchy. Her women have been portrayed as intelligent, questioning women who are not contented with the injustice and rebellion against them. So

Anita Nair's women raise the question of their way of life consolidated by patriarchy, and see it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a field of battle to vanquish their oppressors.

Unit-V Short Story

1. Annie Saumont-The Finest Story In The World

2. Kate Chopin-The Story of an Hour

INTRODUCTION

Annie Saumont (1927 – 31 January 2017) was a French short story writer and English to French translator.

Saumont started as a specialist in English literature and an English to French translator. She has translated books by V.S. Naipaul, Nadine Gordimer and John Fowles among others.

Saumont is best known for her short stories, however. She has been writing short stories for twenty years and now has some 200 to her name.[2] She has won a number of prizes for her work including the 1981 Prix Goncourt de la Nouvelle for *Quelquefois dans les cérémonies*, the 1989 SGDL Short Story prize for *Je suis pas un camion*, and the 1993 Renaissance Short Story Prize for *Les voilà quel bonheur*.

ANNIE SAUMONT (b. 1927)

The Finest Story in the World

Translated by Elizabeth Fallaize

Okay. Let's get things properly organized. Yes. The list. As usual.

She tears a page out from her notebook. Someone's gone off with my pencil again.

dry-cleaner's
Medical bumph
parent's evening—Charlène
appointment paediatrician
water hydrangeas
paint velux
adaptor
cleaning stuff
frozen food order

She gets back from the dry-cleaner's. Crosses that off. She fills in the medical expenses claim form. Jean had flu then asthma. Jean's the one who doesn't want to go and live with his mother. She sticks the stamps on the form. Must get Pascal to sign it and send it off to his firm's insurance.

Parent's evening. Five o'clock sharp. She can drop the baby off at the playgroup.

Velux. That can wait.

There's another thing—not on the list, in her head—always being shelved, always back on the table that will have to get done one day, her wild dream of writing the finest story in the world.

Yes, everyone knows. *The Finest Story in the World* goes back nearly a century. For Kipling it was the story of the writer who tries to tell the finest story in the world but who abandons his project when the bank clerk holding the key to the story falls in love with the young salesgirl taken on by the tobacconist. And loses all interest in the story.

Woman, then, is an obstacle to writing.

But there are women who write.

She writes.

When she gets a spare minute. When everything is sparkling. When the final of the Cupwinner's Cup is live on television and she can forget that she lives with a man who needs a sympathetic listener in the evenings. After a good dinner.

She starts cooking. She starts writing. The osso bucco bubbles gently then turns to cinders. She opens all the windows, puts the charred pan in to soak. Gets out a tin of sausages with lentils, meal-in-a-minute. No way is a burnt dinner going to mean the end of the finest story in the world. She's going to get this story written. Just as soon as she's scrawled an affectionate invitation to Aunt Josiane to come for the weekend—poor Aunt Josiane, lonely and depressed.

vacuum bag
tax payment
repot geraniums
clear chest of drawers
shorten curtains

She's writing.

She's writing in her notebooks. She enters it into the Mac. She writes while the baby's asleep. She writes between bouts of anxiety—has he vomited his bottle? That little spot on his cheek that she noticed just now, could it be the first symptom of some infectious illness? Why is he so quiet? She runs to check if he's still breathing.

She's writing. She's not writing. Charlène is whining, nobody likes me. Charlène is complaining that she's fat and ugly. Don't be so silly. Look at yourself in the mirror. I got D in my end of term test. Ooh! that's rather different. Charlène resolves to give up chocolate eclairs and to go through her homework in future with her mother.

go through homework
sort out winter clothes
ironing
mothball cupboards
senior citizens' club visit
press-studs, 50 cm velcro tape
fruit vegetables
subscription TV magazine

Jean wants to have his friends round one Saturday evening. For a mega rock and rap session. She shudders. Had no idea what she was taking on

When she gets a spare minute. When everything is sparkling. When the final of the Cupwinner's Cup is live on television and she can forget that she lives with a man who needs a sympathetic listener in the evenings. After a good dinner.

She starts cooking. She starts writing. The osso bucco bubbles gently then turns to cinders. She opens all the windows, puts the charred pan in to soak. Gets out a tin of sausages with lentils, meal-in-a-minute. No way is a burnt dinner going to mean the end of the finest story in the world. She's going to get this story written. Just as soon as she's scrawled an affectionate invitation to Aunt Josiane to come for the weekend—poor Aunt Josiane, lonely and depressed.

vacuum bag
tax payment
repot geraniums
clear chest of drawers
shorten curtains

She's writing.

She's writing in her notebooks. She enters it into the Mac. She writes while the baby's asleep. She writes between bouts of anxiety—has he vomited his bottle? That little spot on his cheek that she noticed just now, could it be the first symptom of some infectious illness? Why is he so quiet? She runs to check if he's still breathing.

She's writing. She's not writing. Charlène is whining, nobody likes me. Charlène is complaining that she's fat and ugly. Don't be so silly. Look at yourself in the mirror. I got D in my end of term test. Ooh! that's rather different. Charlène resolves to give up chocolate eclairs and to go through her homework in future with her mother.

go through homework
sort out winter clothes
ironing
mothball cupboards
senior citizens' club visit
press-studs, 50 cm velcro tape
fruit vegetables
subscription TV magazine

Jean wants to have his friends round one Saturday evening. For a mega rock and rap session. She shudders. Had no idea what she was taking on

when she agreed to be a stepmum. Chin up, others have been in the same boat. Listen Jean, we'll see. Just now I have to write. And it's time for your basketball training.

Write? says Jean. Write to who? Nobody writes any more. What for, with mobiles. . . .

She's not writing. She is writing. In between she decides that the kids can use the garage and make sandwiches in the kitchen on condition that . . . But what's the point in having conditions when the promises are bound to be broken, recriminations inevitable . . . Don't let Jean get on at you advises Pascal, retreating to the safety of his study. This from a man who has never been able to say no to his son.

From a man who has a study.

A room of one's own. How can she sort out a refuge for herself in a house of modest proportions in which the children all have their own room and Dad has a study?

There is no bar on writing the finest story in the world on the kitchen table. Nor on thinking about questions of syntax whilst stirring the tomato coulis with a wooden spoon.

Charlène's long hair is infested with vermin. The school nurse said to take emergency measures. Don't want my hair shaved off. The shampoo guarantees the nits will die a perfumed death. To be repeated twice more this week. Nits in the baby's hair. Bugs in the word processing system. Women and computers, Jean sniggers. You just pressed *shift* when you should've pressed *alt.* Shall I put it right for you, he suggests, good Samaritan. Okay, for the rock and rap session she will supply an enormous pizza and a whole crate of cans of coke. She will send Charlène off to her best friend's house for the night. And suggest to Pascal that it's about time they visited the grandmothers. She and Pascal and the baby will stay with one or other of them until Sunday afternoon. Heaving out through the hatchback a mountain of stuff, folding cot, high chair, pack of nappies, jars of baby food, inflatable bath, cleansing milk. Hello stranger. Thought you'd forgotten you had parents. Armelle—(Jean again)—Armelle, is my Beachmania T-shirt ready? Still in the dirty washing basket! I've got nothing left to wear.

Baby's gums are sore. Can she imagine writing the finest story in the world with her right hand, whilst rocking a baby with teeth coming through in the crook of her left arm?

I hate to disturb you, says Pascal, I don't suppose by any chance you've seen . . .

Have I seen, haven't I seen, what can I say (the missing folder, the

watch that Pascal takes off and puts down in a different place every night, the credit card that he is quite sure he put away in its case, Jean's gameboy, Charlène's fluorescent pogs). See nothing, say nothing, hear nothing, keeping her head down, she writes. Ever since she was a kid she's dreamed of being a writer. Without ever telling her parents, they would have shrugged their shoulders, where does she get these funny ideas. Her mother would have added that girls need only

Yes: spin wool and keep house.

Peace at last. Then the telephone.

Elsa, her best friend from way back. Hello Armelle, Gérard is having an affair.

Look Elsa, you've thought this too many times before.

Armelle, this time I swear he is.

The tenth time at least (the twentieth even?) that Elsa has rung her in desperation, Help he's having an affair. That could be the subject of the saddest story in the world. And the most farcical.

The computer is purring. Charlène, watch the plug. Have I saved it. Pascal opens the door a crack, Armelle, would you have a second to read over my article, you're so good at spelling.

Charlène is complaining, the baby is just ridiculous, throws everything he's given on the floor. Next time, young man, I am not picking your car up. The Ferrari crashes noisily to the floor. Too bad, I warned you. The baby starts howling.

Just at that moment the health visitor rings at the door. Sorry, just a routine visit, don't take it the wrong way.

She doesn't take it the wrong way. Sighs.

While I'm here I wanted to let you know that the old lady next door is having problems remembering things. Perhaps you could, discreetly . . . Mum, you said you'd help me make some paper flowers, the teacher wants them for the school fête. You haven't got time ? Don't be surprised then when I don't get to move up to secondary school next year.

Wednesday. The kids out of school in the neighbourhood are making a racket. The play area down the street is showered in bits of glass. It takes her for ever to pick them up. What is the best way to give meaning to life? Write the finest story in the world or rid the planet of broken glass?

Or take a lover. She'll pick a good one. Rich and loving and generous. She'll talk to him. When they've made love. Pascal goes to sleep after lovemaking. The lover will listen to her. She'll tell him about writing, about how demanding it is. He'll understand.

He'll take her away from this place. Somewhere where no one needs her any more. Pascal will have to cope with Jean's behaviour, Charlène's moods, his aspirations in senior management, his choice of tie, the baby's vaccinations. And the plumbing. Far away beneath a panoramic blue sky she'll open her notebooks and fill them up in future without wasting any pages on lists of domestic tasks, blissfully untroubled by thoughts of shopping baskets.

No. There would be regrets and remorse. The pain of having hurt and betrayed. There would be anguish. The sky has turned grey.

And the finest story in the world will never be written.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR

Kate Chopin was born Catherine O'Flaherty in St. Louis on February 8, 1850. Her mother, Eliza Faris, came from an old French family that lived outside of St. Louis. Her father, Thomas, was a highly successful Irish-born businessman; he died when Kate was five years old. Chopin grew up in a household dominated by women: her mother, great-grandmother, and the female slaves her mother owned, who took care of the children. Young Chopin spent a lot of time in the attic reading such masters as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and the Brontës. Her great-grandmother taught her to speak French and play piano, and related stories about her great-great-grandmother, a woman who ran her own business, was separated from her husband, and had children while unmarried. This woman great example for young Katie of a woman's strength, potential for independence, and the real workings of life's passions.

Like the rest of her family, Chopin grew up strongly pro-Confederate, a sentiment enhanced by her beloved half-brother's death in the Civil War. In fact, 13-year-old Chopin was arrested when she tore a Union flag from her family's porch that had been hung there by the triumphant Union troops. She became known as St. Louis's "Littlest Rebel" — a trait that marked Chopin's behavior as an adult, when she attended her own interests more closely than society's arbitrary and sexist dictates.

Education, Marriage, and Children

Chopin attended a St. Louis Catholic girl's school, Academy of the Sacred Heart, from ages five to eighteen. There, the nuns continued the female-oriented education begun at home by her great-grandmother, providing a forum for their students to express their thoughts and share their opinions.

After finishing her education at Academy of the Sacred Heart, Chopin entered St. Louis society, where she met Oscar Chopin, a French-born *cotton factor* (the middleman between cotton grower and buyer). She married Oscar in June 1870, and they moved to New Orleans. Between 1871 and 1879, she had six children. Like Edna and Léonce Pontellier, the Chopins vacationed during summers on Grand Isle, to avoid the cholera outbreaks in the city of New Orleans. Also like

Edna, Chopin took long walks alone in New Orleans, often while smoking cigarettes, much to the astonishment of passersby.

When Oscar's cotton brokerage business failed due to drought and his mismanagement, they moved to the small French village of Cloutierville, Louisiana where Oscar had family and a small amount of land. Chopin was distinguished in this tiny town by her habit of riding horses astride rather than sidesaddle, dressing too fashionably for her surroundings, and smoking cigarettes — all of which were considered unladylike. Many of the locals found their way into her later stories.

Oscar ran a general store in Cloutierville until he died in 1882 of malaria. Upon his death, which left his family in great debt, Chopin ran the store and their small plantation, a highly unusual move for widows at the time. Not until 1884 did Chopin take the usual course for widows, when she and her children moved back to St. Louis to live with her mother. Before she left Cloutierville, Chopin had an affair with a local married man who is said to be the prototype for Alcée Arobin in *The Awakening*.

Her Later Years

A year after Chopin moved her family back to St. Louis, she began to write, publishing first a piece of music called "Polka for Piano" in 1888 and then a poem called "If It Might Be" in 1889. She then turned her attention toward fiction and concentrated on that genre for the rest of her life.

Resenting the expectation that she was to spend her days making social calls on other women, Chopin began St. Louis' first literary salon, a social gathering one evening a week where both women and men could gather for some intelligent conversation. Through these salons, she fulfilled the social requirement to entertain regularly but did so under her own terms. A benefit of these salons was professional advancement: Publishers and reviewers alike attended Chopin's salons, providing a fertile network for the ambitious Chopin to pursue additional publication opportunities.

Chopin published almost 100 short stories, three novels, and one play within twelve years — after she began writing, she pursued it with the same business sense she displayed while running her husband's general store after he died.

In her last years, health problems made writing difficult, although many people attributed the decrease in her writing as a result of the storm of negative publicity that accompanied *The Awakening*'s publication in 1899. Her death came suddenly; she died on August 22, 1904 of a massive cerebral hemorrhage.

Literary Writing

Chopin's first short story was published in 1889; she began her first novel, *At Fault*, that year as well. Chopin was assiduous about submitting manuscripts and cultivating relationships with influential editors. Her stories appeared in prestigious magazines such as *Vogue* and *Atlantic Monthly*, and two collections of her short stories were published in book form, as *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). Both of those books were well received, although regarded by many reviewers and critics primarily as "regionalist" work, meaning it had little literary value beyond the portrait it presented of the Louisiana/Missouri region.

Her most famous work, *The Awakening*, appeared in 1899. As in much of Chopin's writing, this novel concerns itself with issues of identity and morality. Unlike the rest of her work, it created a tremendous controversy. While many reviewers deemed it a worthy novel, an equal and more vocal number condemned it, not simply for Edna's behavior, but for her lack of remorse about her behavior — and Chopin's refusal to judge Edna either way.

A well-regarded author at the time of her death, despite the controversy surrounding *The Awakening*, Chopin's work fell into obscurity for many years as regional literature fell out of literary favor. Chopin's work did not come to the attention of the established literary world until 1969, after almost 70 years of obscurity, with the publication of Per Seyersted's critical biography and his edition of her complete works. The 1960s feminist movement in America had a great deal to do with her new-found fame as well; that movement brought to attention the work of women who had been excluded from the literary canon by its male creators. Today, her work is part of the canon of American literature.

THE STORY OF AN HOUR

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will--as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under hte breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence

with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhold, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease--of the joy that kills.