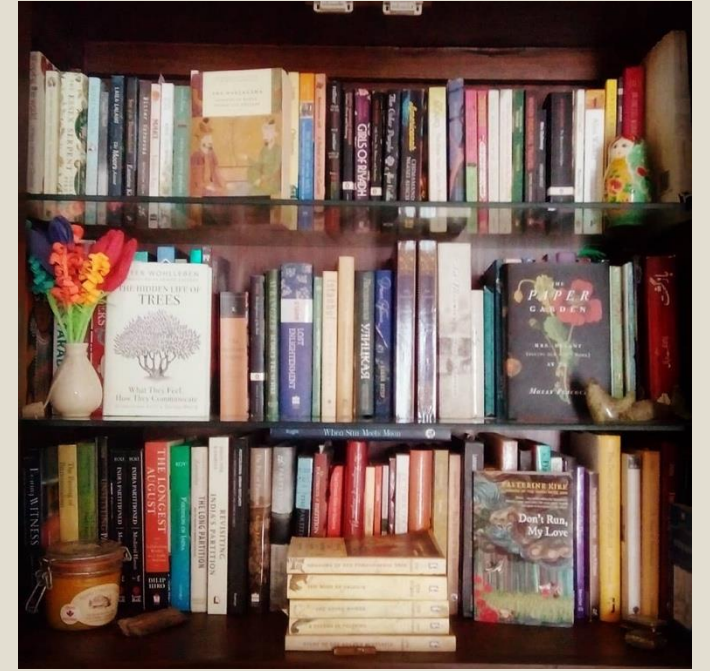




- What is literature? Why do we read?
- “Literariness,” and what constitutes a literary genre

# Genre

- Genres are classes or types of literature
  - Aristotelian definition: “works are classified in accordance with the similarity in the principles by which they are organized in order to achieve a particular kind of emotional effect” (Abrams 109).
  - Wittgenstein: “family resemblances” (110).



# Genre

“There has also been interest in the role that **generic assumptions have played in shaping the work that an author composes, and also in establishing expectations that alter the way that a reader will interpret and respond to a particular work.** Whatever the present skepticism, however, about the old belief that genres constitute inherent species in the realm of literature, the fact that **generic distinctions remain indispensable** in literary discourse is attested by the unceasing publication of books whose titles announce that they deal with tragedy, the lyric, pastoral, the novel, or another of the many types and subtypes into which literature has over the centuries been classified” (110).





# “Literariness”

- That quality that distinguishes and separates literary texts from non-literary texts
- What are non-literary texts?
  - newspaper articles, advertisements, posters, reports etc.
- In what way are literary texts different from non-literary texts?
  - craft of language, work of the imagination, story-telling

# Temsüla Ao (1945-2022)

- Born in Jorhat (Assam), lived a lot of her life in Shillong
- Five books of poetry; two collections of short stories; ethnography of Ao-Naga oral tradition; memoir
- Director, Northeast Zone Cultural Centre; Dean (Humanities and Education), North Eastern Hill University, Shillong
- Sahitya Akademi award for the collection *Laburnum for my Head* (2009)
- Padmashri (2007); Nagaland Governor's Award for Distinction in Literature (2009)
- Depicts both the uniqueness and universality of life in north-eastern locations; women's lives in particular; lives of ordinary people who are caught in the cross-fire



# Agenda

- Using Temsüla Ao's "Laburnum for my Head" (2009) as an example:
  - What is literary analysis or literary criticism?
  - How do we study literary texts?



- Analysis or interpretation of literary texts, which form the primary ground of study.
  - interpreting literary texts,
  - arriving at a certain understanding and position on the text through this process, and
  - contributing to making meaning and adding to scholarship about the text.
- Literature reveals its meanings and truths through readers (and all literary scholars are, first and foremost, readers).
- When we interpret and analyze a literary text, we participate in its creation:
  - Reader-Response Criticism/ Reception Theory: “process of reading a literary text” (Abrams 256)
  - “These [gaps] the reader must fill in by a creative participation with what is given in the text before him [*sic*]. The experience of reading is an evolving process of anticipation, frustration, retrospection, reconstruction, and satisfaction” (257).

**\* Reader-Response Criticism (Abrams 256-260) and Close-Reading; Character; Setting**

# What is literary analysis or literary criticism?

- Jennifer Dubrow quoting Mikhail Bakhtin:

“In his influential essay ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,’ Bakhtin pointed out that readers and listeners comprise the world ‘that creates the text, for all its aspects—the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, the performers of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text—participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text.’” (*Cosmopolitan Dreams*, 12)



# Mechanics of Literary Analysis

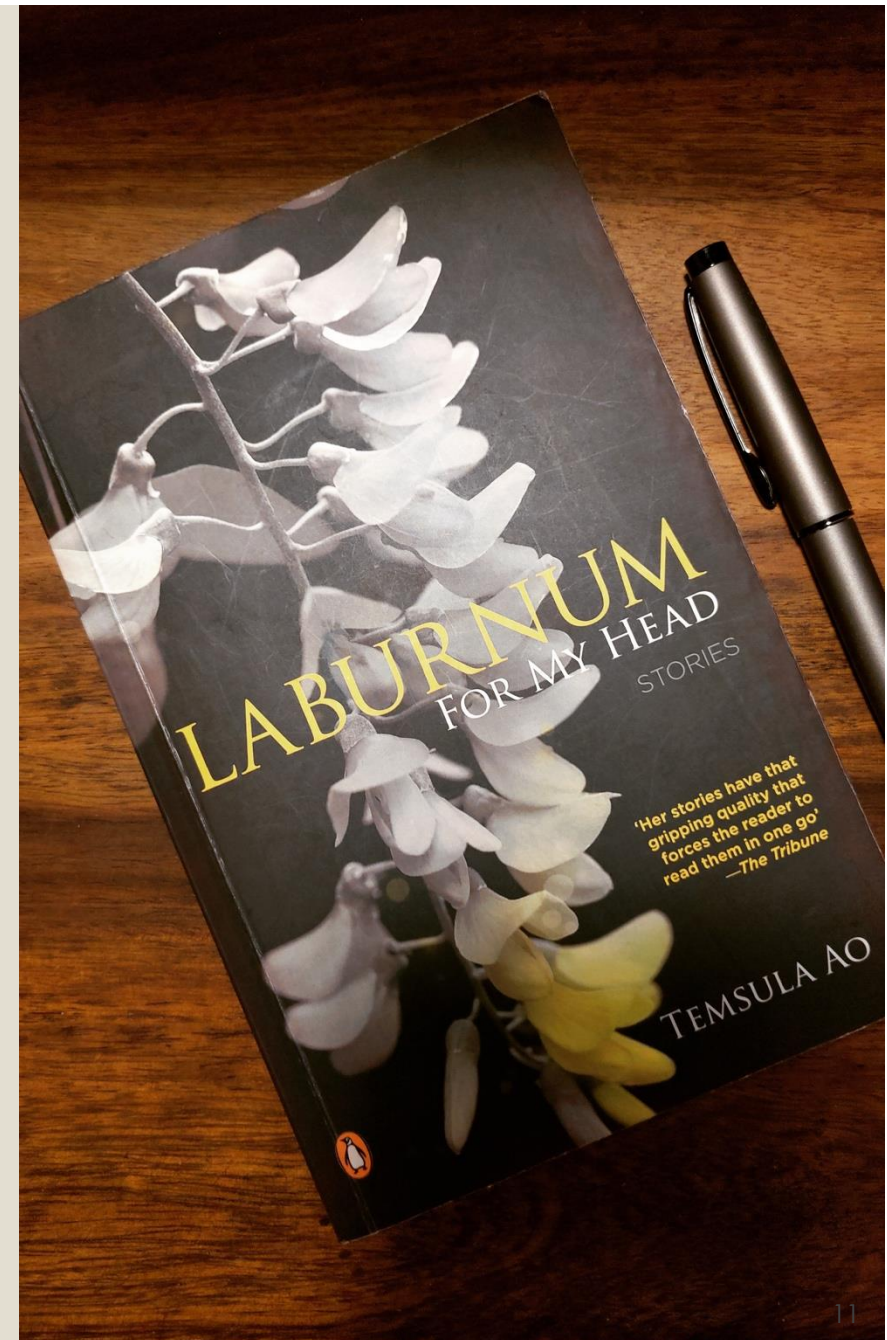
- Interpreting and analyzing literary texts involves
  - making an argument/claim about a literary text and then justifying it using supporting evidence (the text)
  - using reasoning, logic, argumentation, analysis, juxtaposition (comparison and contrast) to explain your evidence
- Mechanics of Analysis:
  - What is being said?
  - How is it being said?
  - Why is it being said?(Search for patterns)

# Mechanics of Literary Analysis

- **Be thorough:**
  - It is our job to fully investigate all the possibilities of texts, all the meanings and readings that can come out of them.
  - To say that we are reading too much into a text is often a lazy response, one which is not alive to the ways in which words, texts, images are actively used – on purpose – as a medium to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, ideologies.
- **Technique: close-reading – reading attentively and purposefully**

# Components of a Literary Text

- Language
- Setting
- Structure
- Characters, narratorial persona
- Plot and Story/Narrative



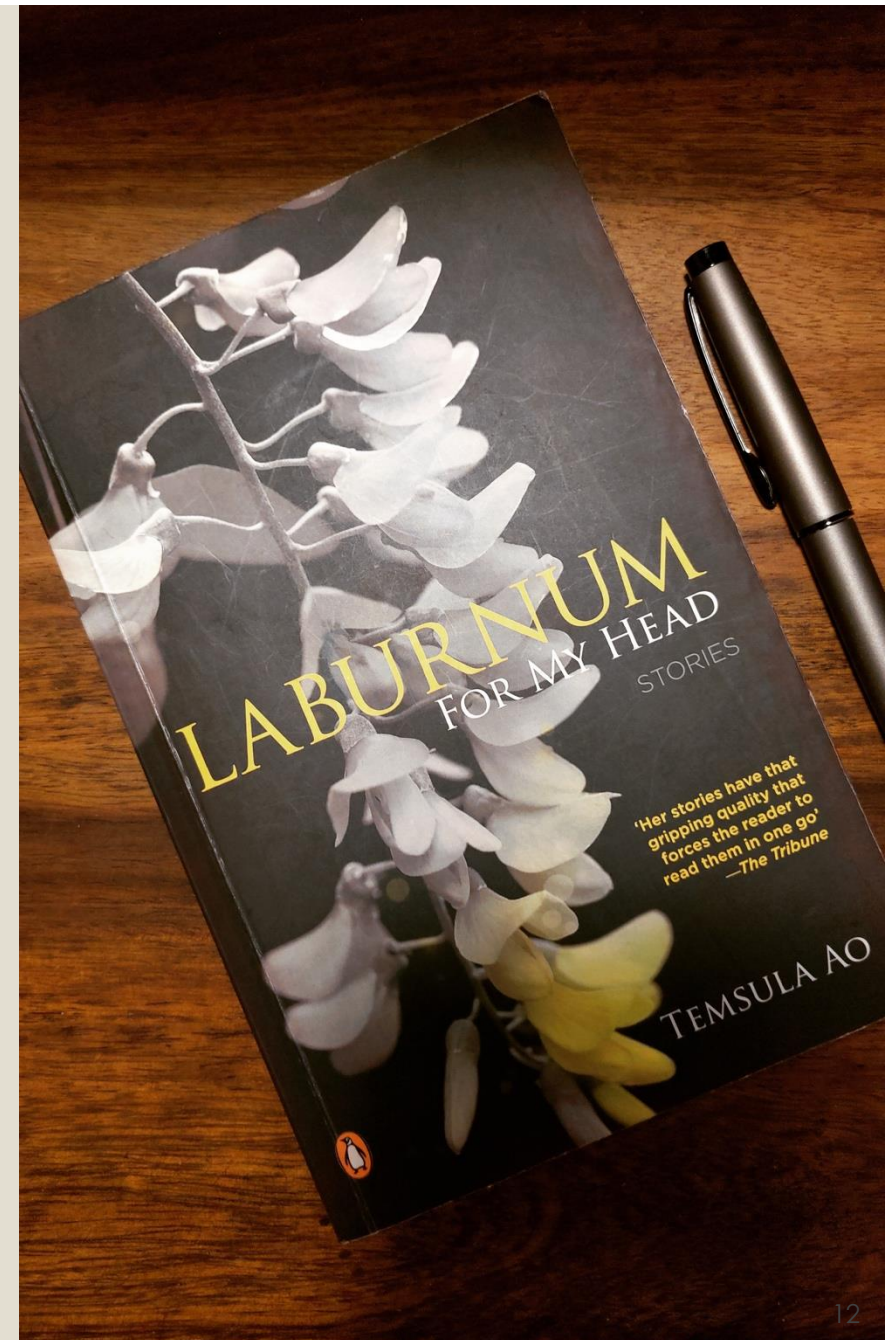


# Language

The medium of literary creativity is language, just as the medium of painting is paint.

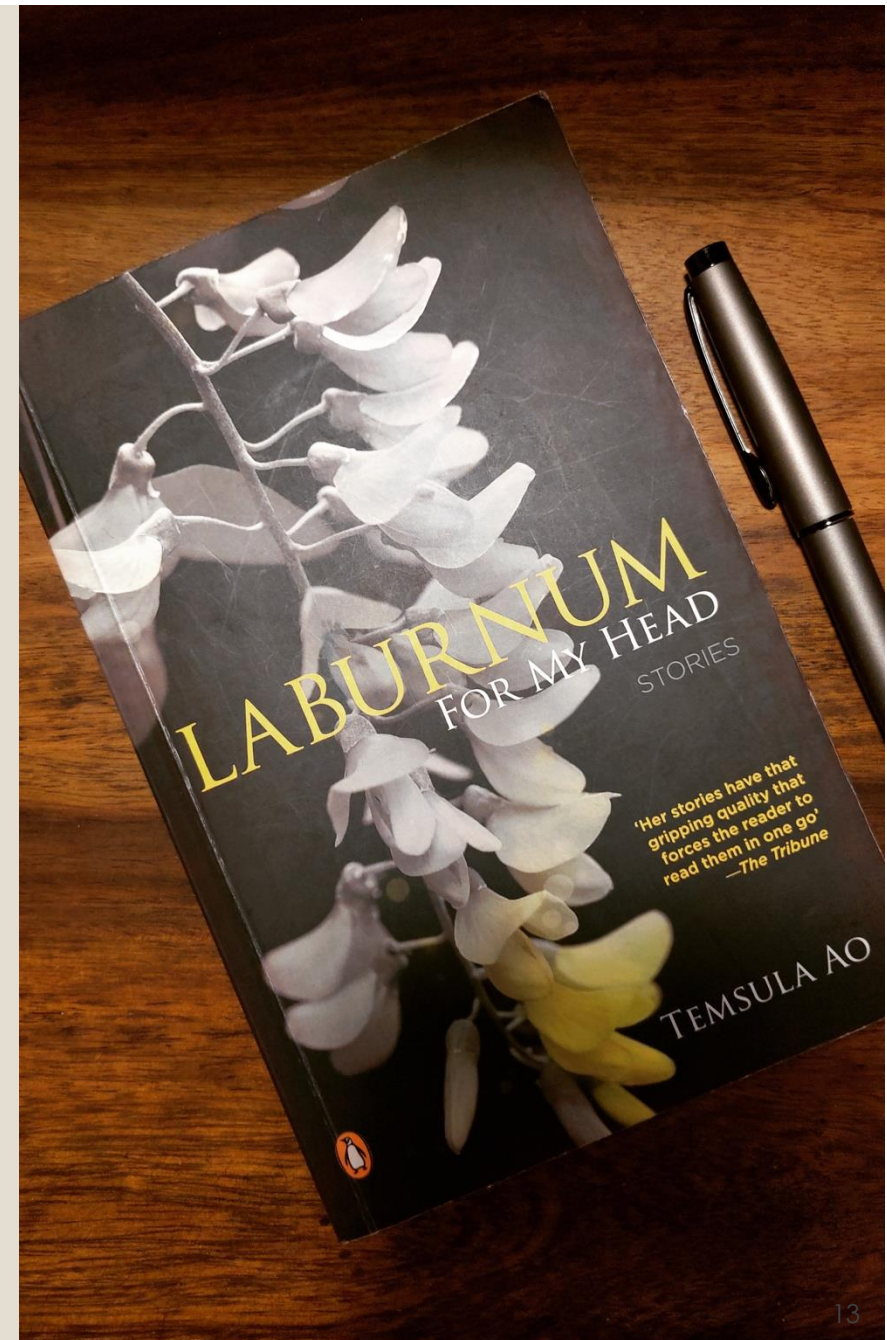
Words and images are to literature what colour and shapes are to painting.

Beauty and meaning are created through language and content.





# Language



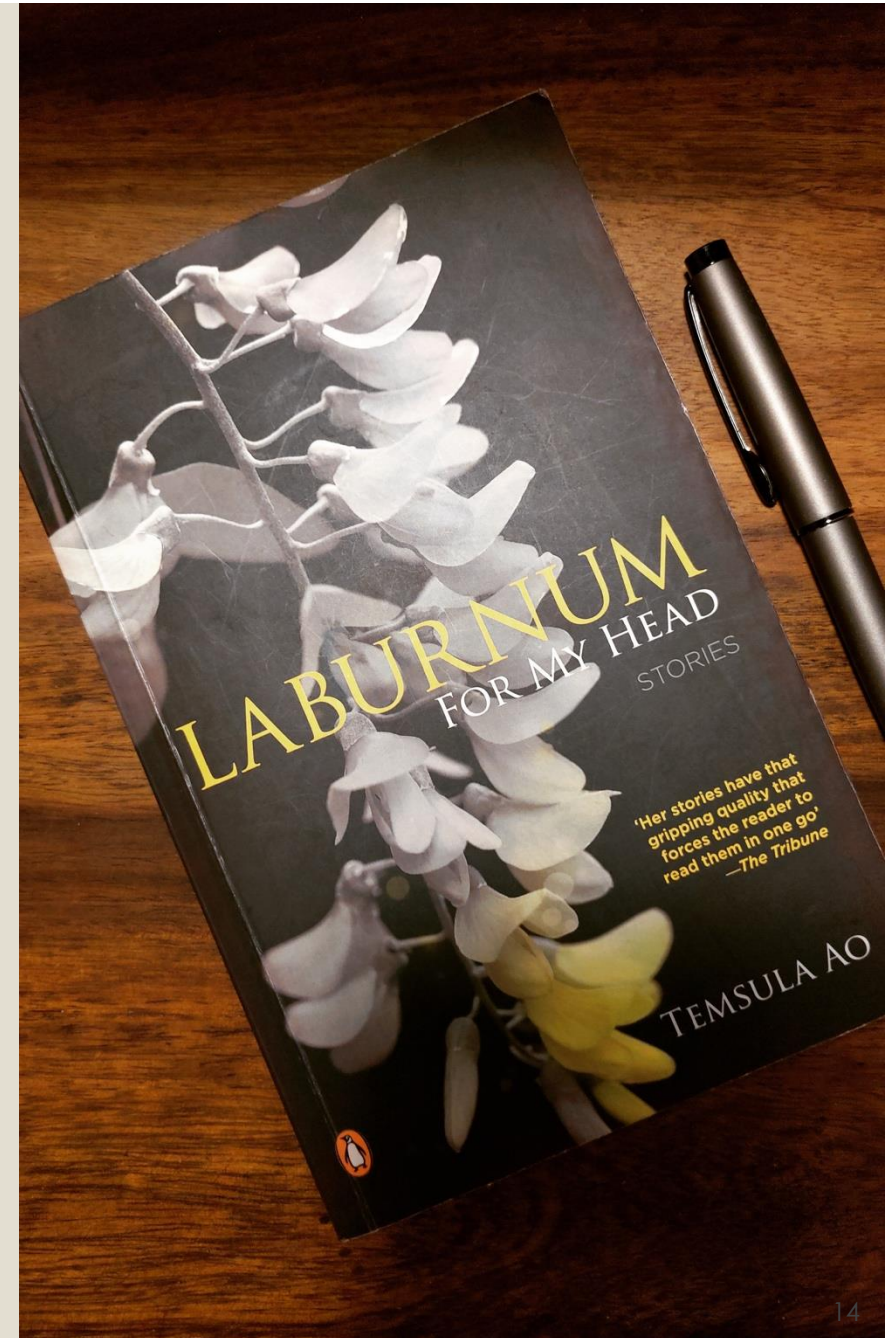
# Language

How does the author use language to convey meaning?

- “magnificent incongruity” (1);
- “annual show of yellow splendour” (2);
- “shy showing” (16)

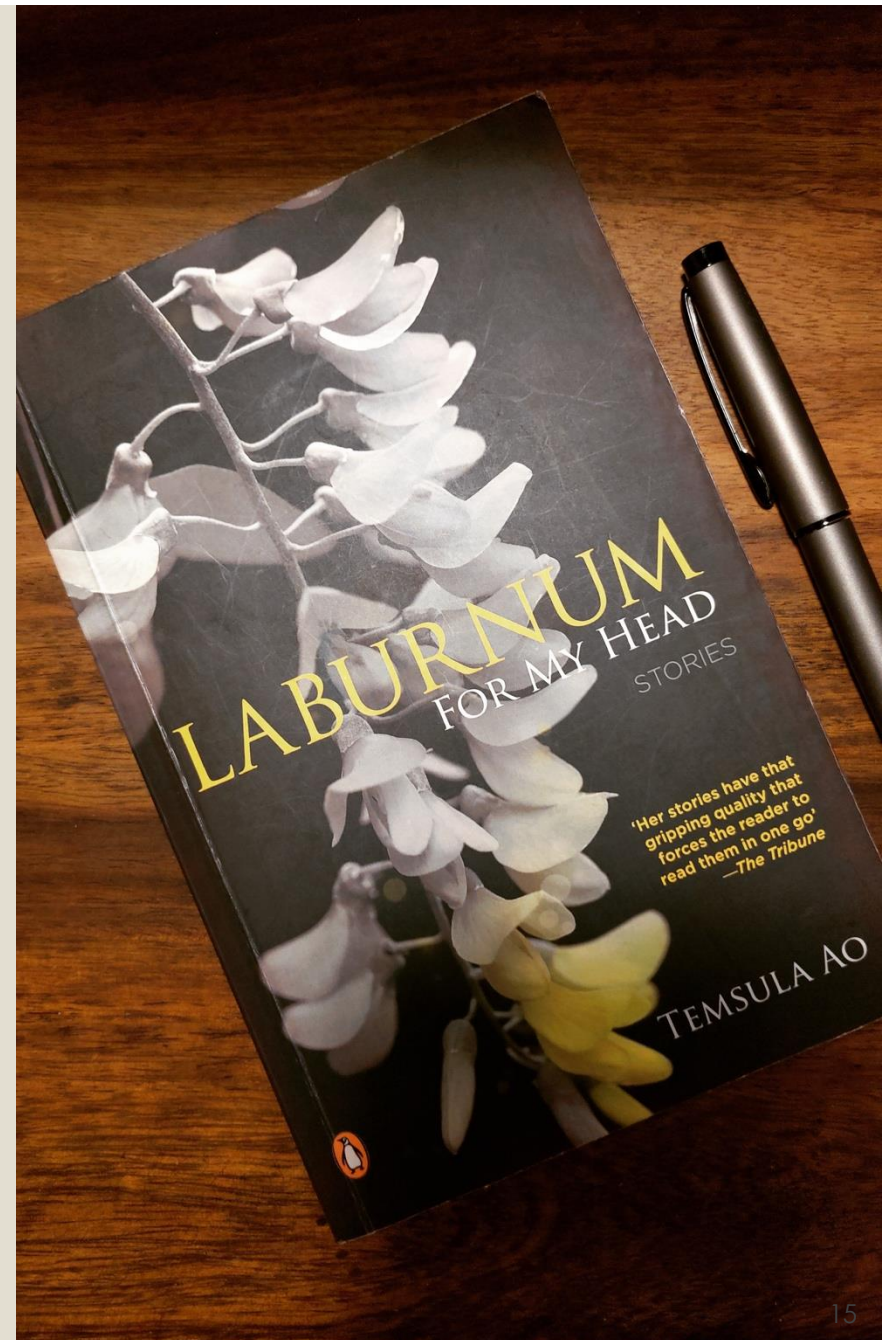
Is there something different about the way the writer does these things that we do not use in ordinary speech or everyday language?

What does this achieve?





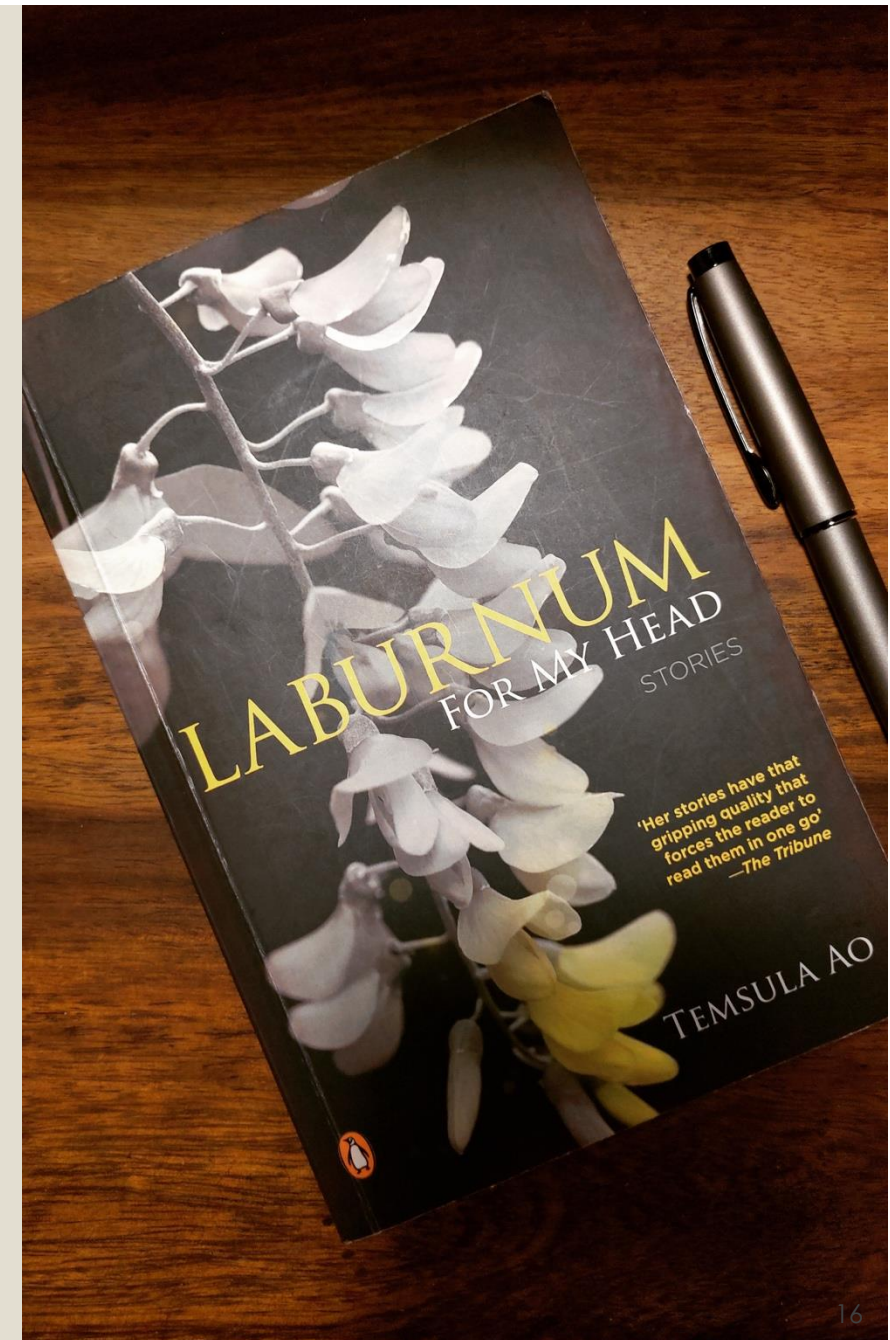
# Setting



# Setting

Setting can be just necessary background in some texts, whereas in others, it can play an important role, e.g. science fiction, fantasy, realist fiction.

- Spatial Setting
- Time frame / Temporal Frame
- Historical time period
- Social circumstances (can vary or remain the same)

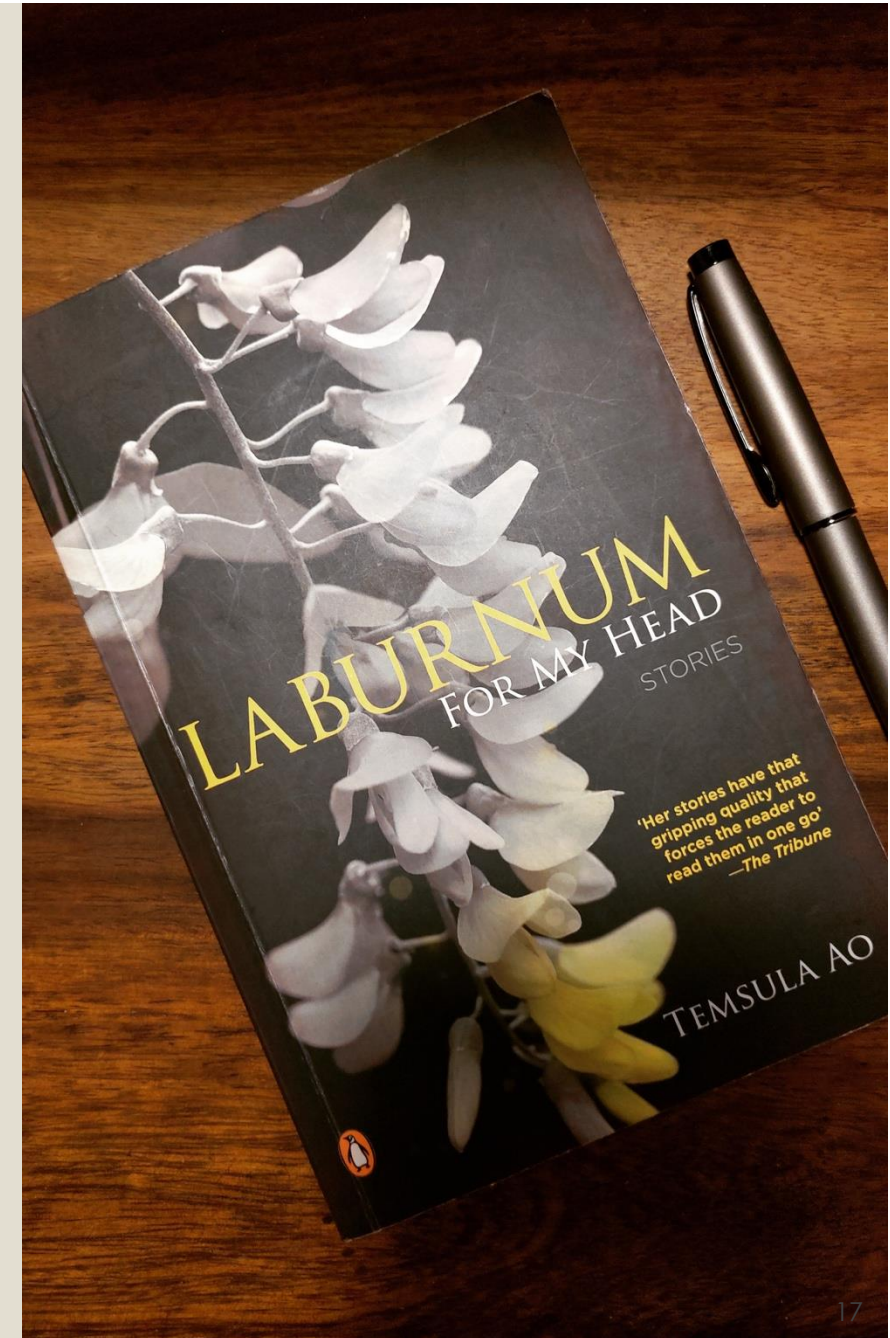




# Setting

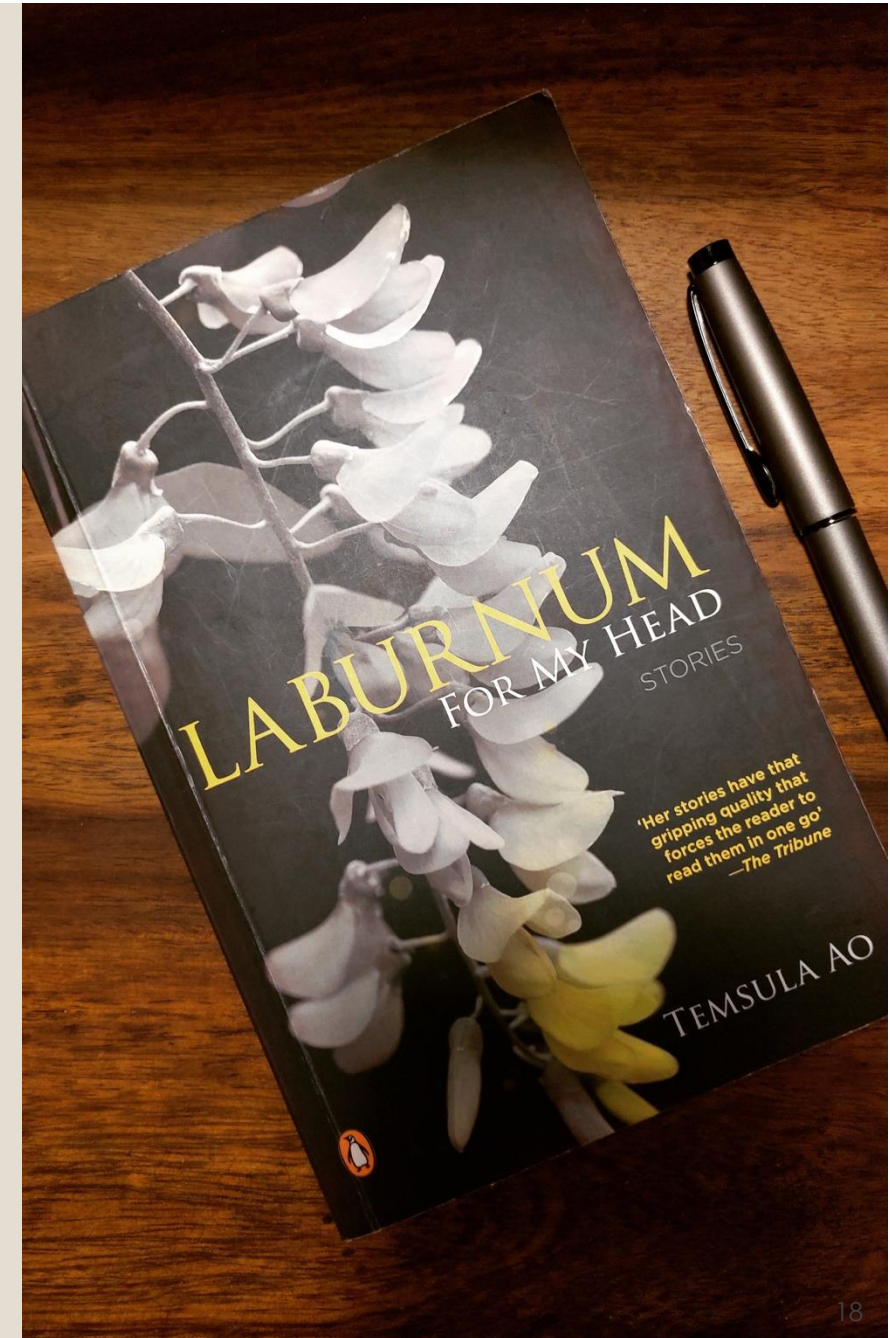
Setting can be just necessary background in some texts, whereas in others, it can play an important role, e.g. science fiction, fantasy, realist fiction.

- Spatial Setting
  - Space and place
    - Town? House? Room? (We know only what is necessary because the entire story is about Lentina's singular fixation with the laburnum)
- Time frame / Temporal Frame
  - How much time elapses during the story?
  - Narrative time (the operation of time): flash-back
- Historical time period
  - internet, DDT, TV?
- Social circumstances (can vary or remain the same)



# Structure

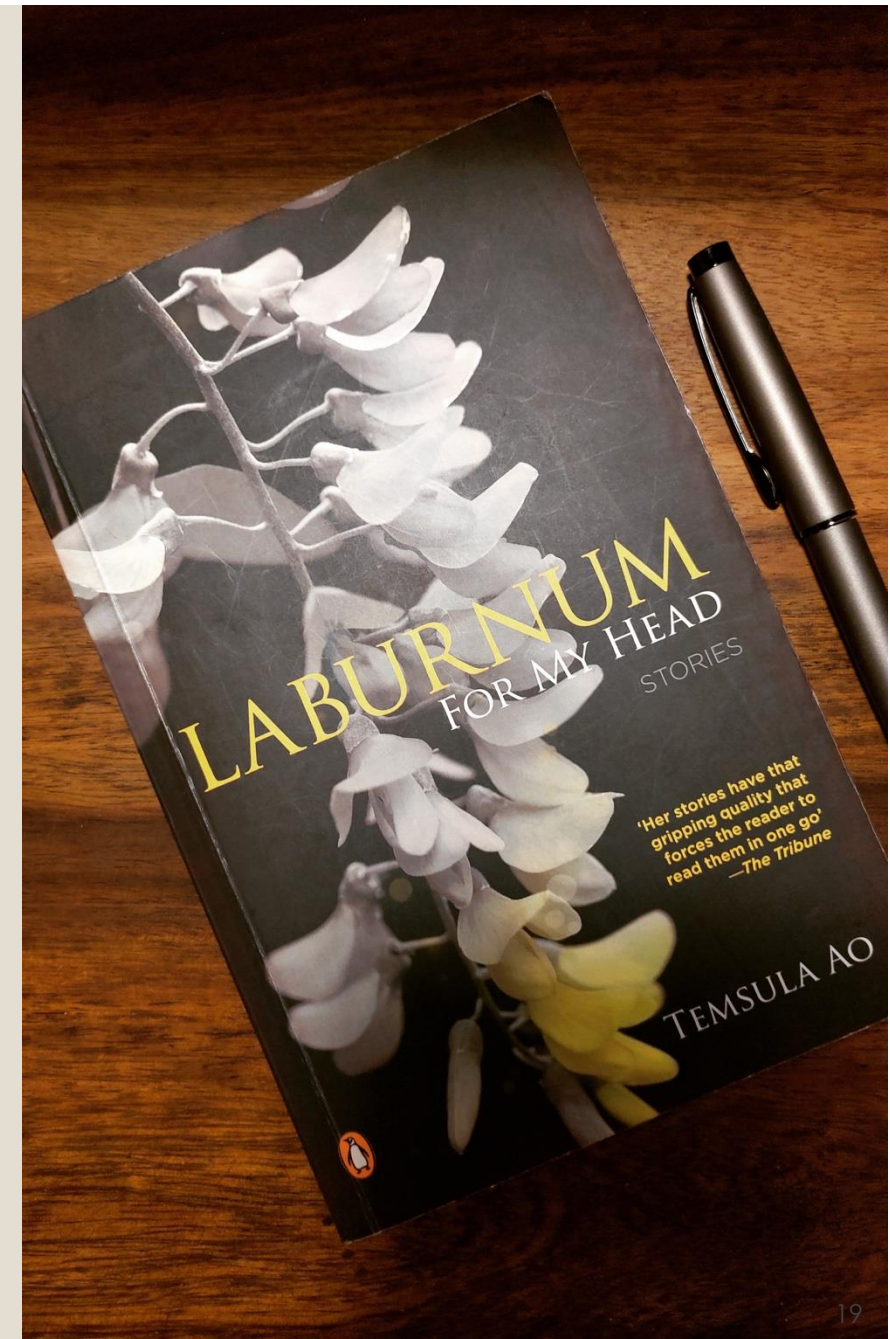
- How is the text constructed? / How is the story told?
  - Which paragraphs involve the narrator commenting or drawing attention to the narration?
  - How much of the text consists of direct speech, i.e. dialogue, and how much of it is reported and descriptive?
  - How does that shape the text and contribute to the meaning we make of it?



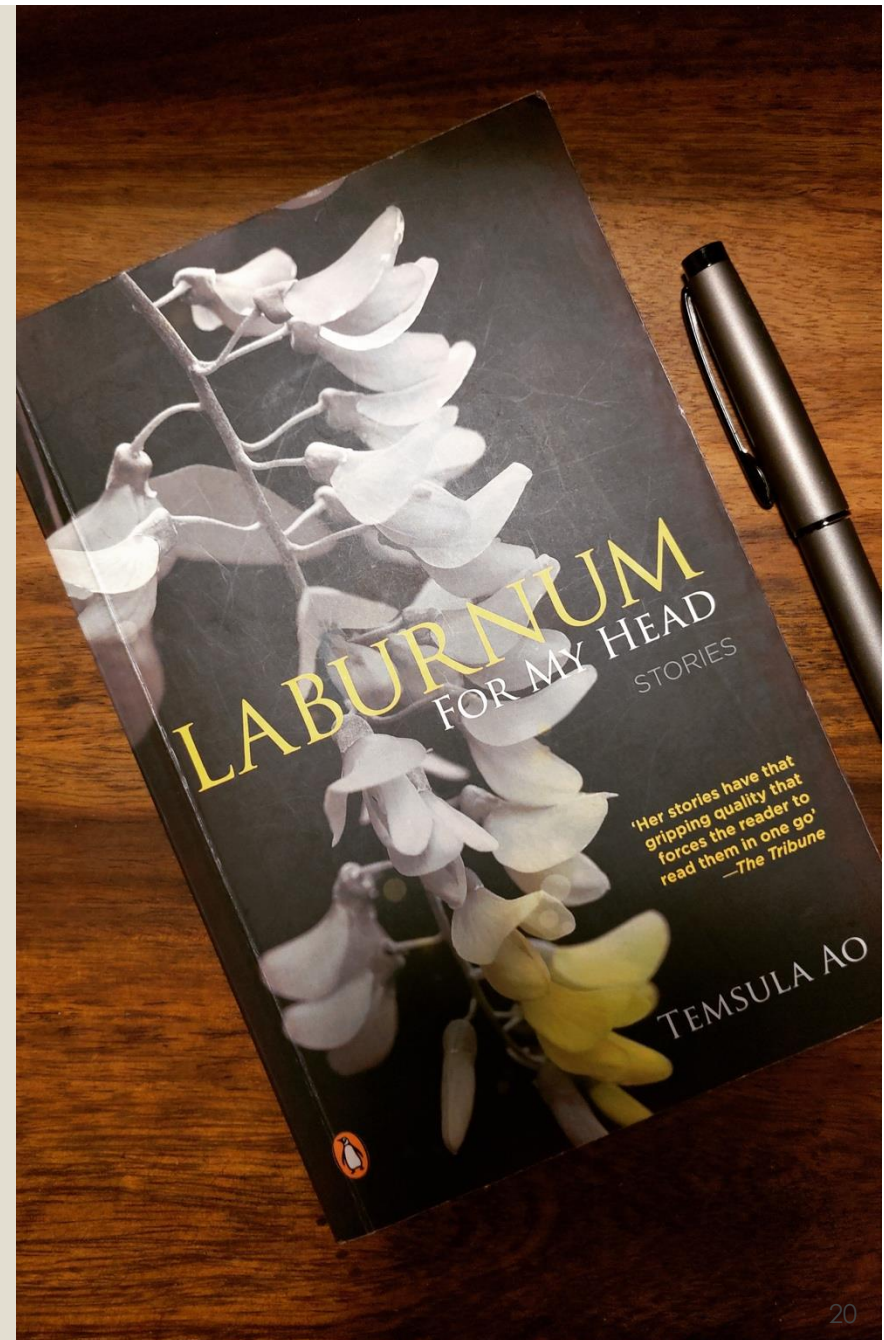


# Structure

- How is the text constructed? / How is the story told?
  - Which paragraphs involve the narrator commenting or drawing attention to the narration?
    - Narratorial sign-posting:
      - “But the story is running ahead of itself and must be told from the beginning” (12)
      - “So ends the story of the un-dramatic life of an ordinary woman who cherished one single passionate wish that a humble laburnum tree should bloom once a year on her crown” (20).
  - How much of the text consists of direct speech, i.e. dialogue, and how much of it is reported and descriptive?
  - How does that shape the text and contribute to the meaning we make of it?
    - e.g. Huma R. Kidwai, *The Hussaini Alam House* (2012)



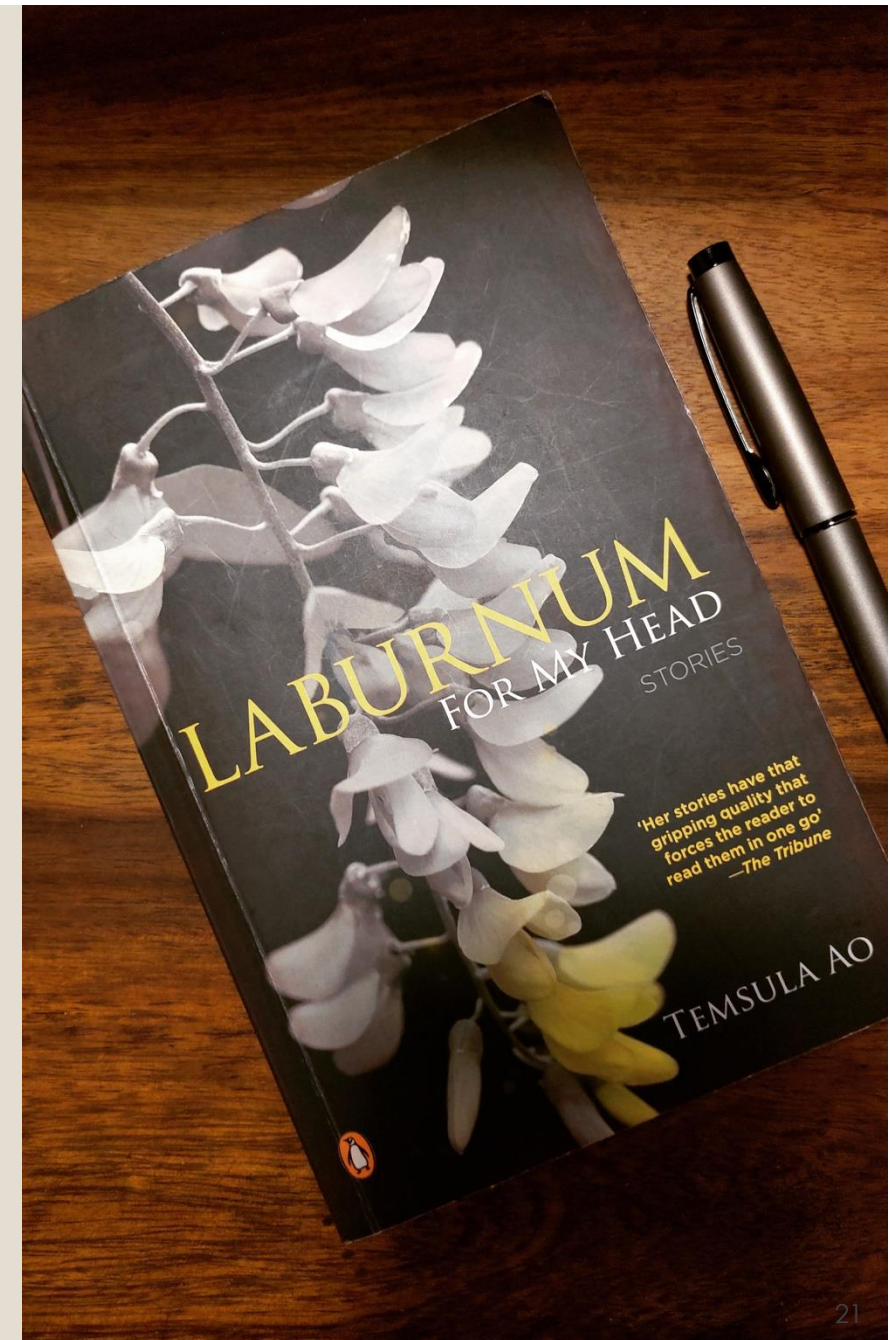
# Characters





# Characters

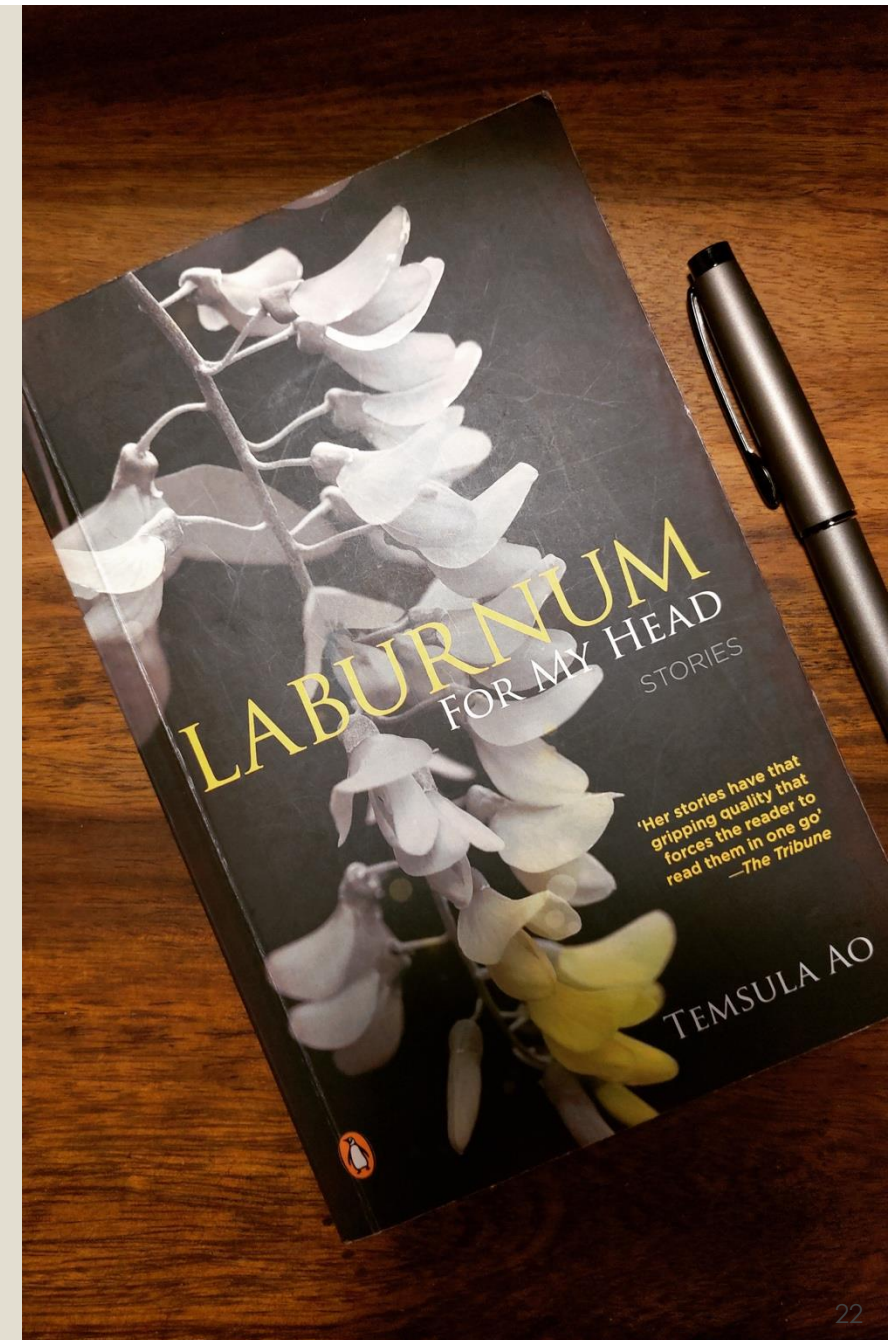
- Characters
  - Figure in a literary work.
  - Flat characters (one-dimensional, simple and simplistic personalities – “kind mother”)
  - Round characters (complex personalities, more believable and plausible);
    - round characters are considered more artistically successful, but there are many successful books and genres where characters are not round, e.g. epic heroes, Sherlock Holmes, while Jane Austen’s Emma or Elizabeth Bennet *is* a round character.



# Characters

- Showing and telling are two strategies that writers use to reveal character:

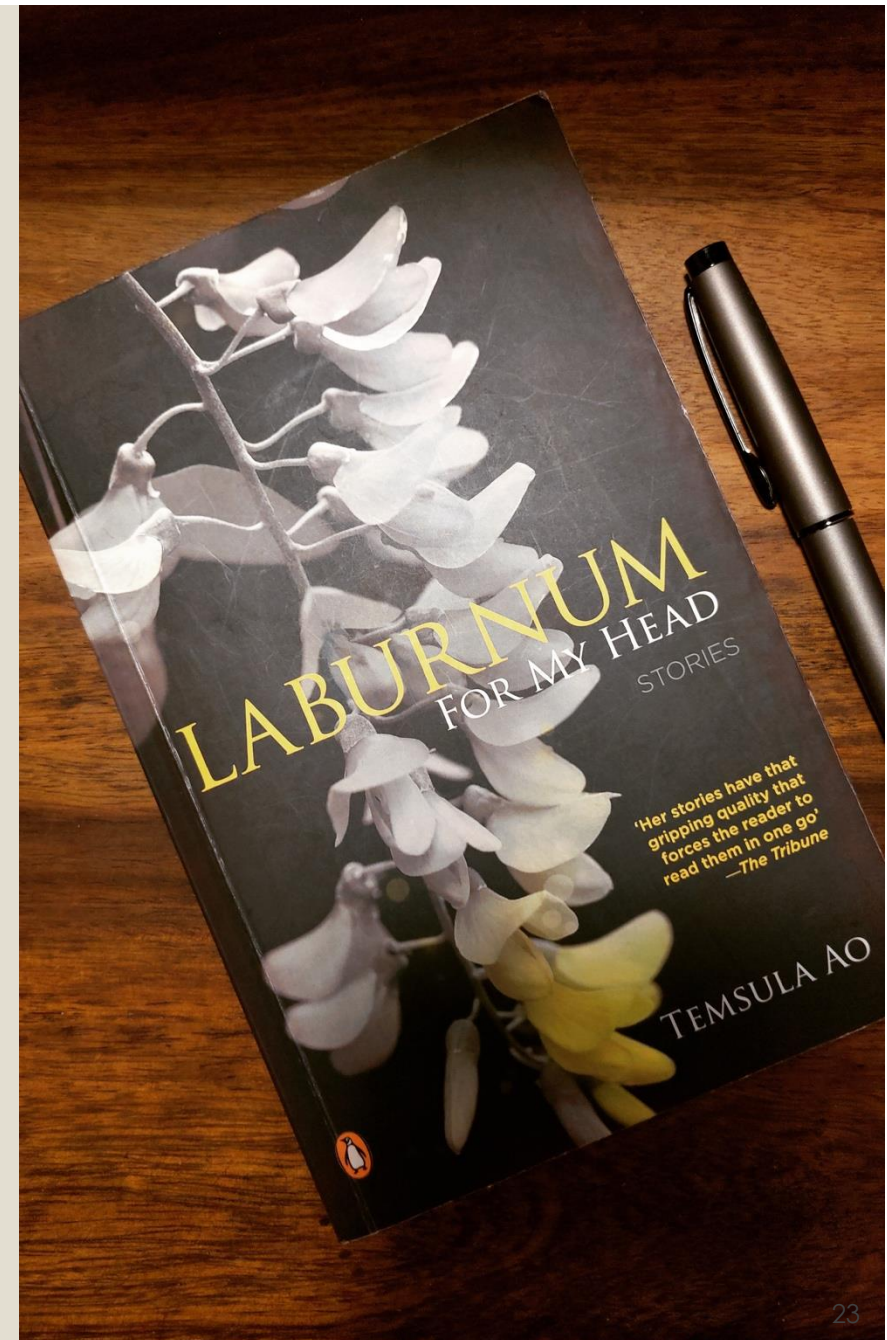
**“In showing (also called ‘the dramatic method’), the author simply presents the characters talking and acting and leaves the reader to infer the motives and dispositions that lie behind what they say and do. The author may show not only external speech and actions, but also a character's inner thoughts, feelings, and responsiveness to events ... In telling, the author intervenes authoritatively in order to describe, and often to evaluate, the motives and dispositional qualities of the characters” (33-4).**





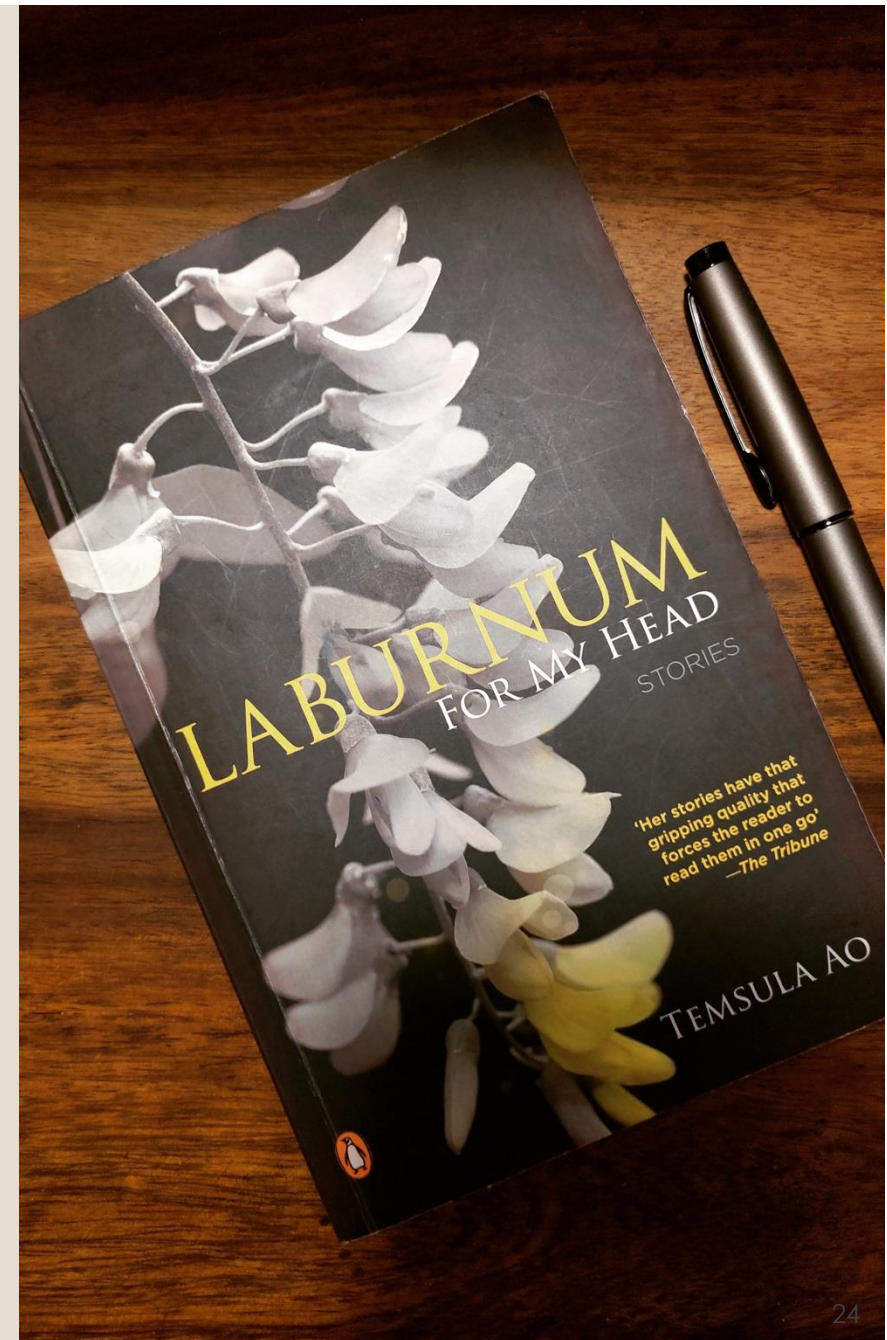
# Characters

- So what kind of character is Lentina (bear in mind that a short story does not give a writer enough space to fully develop a character):
  - Flat or round? Showing or telling?



# Characters

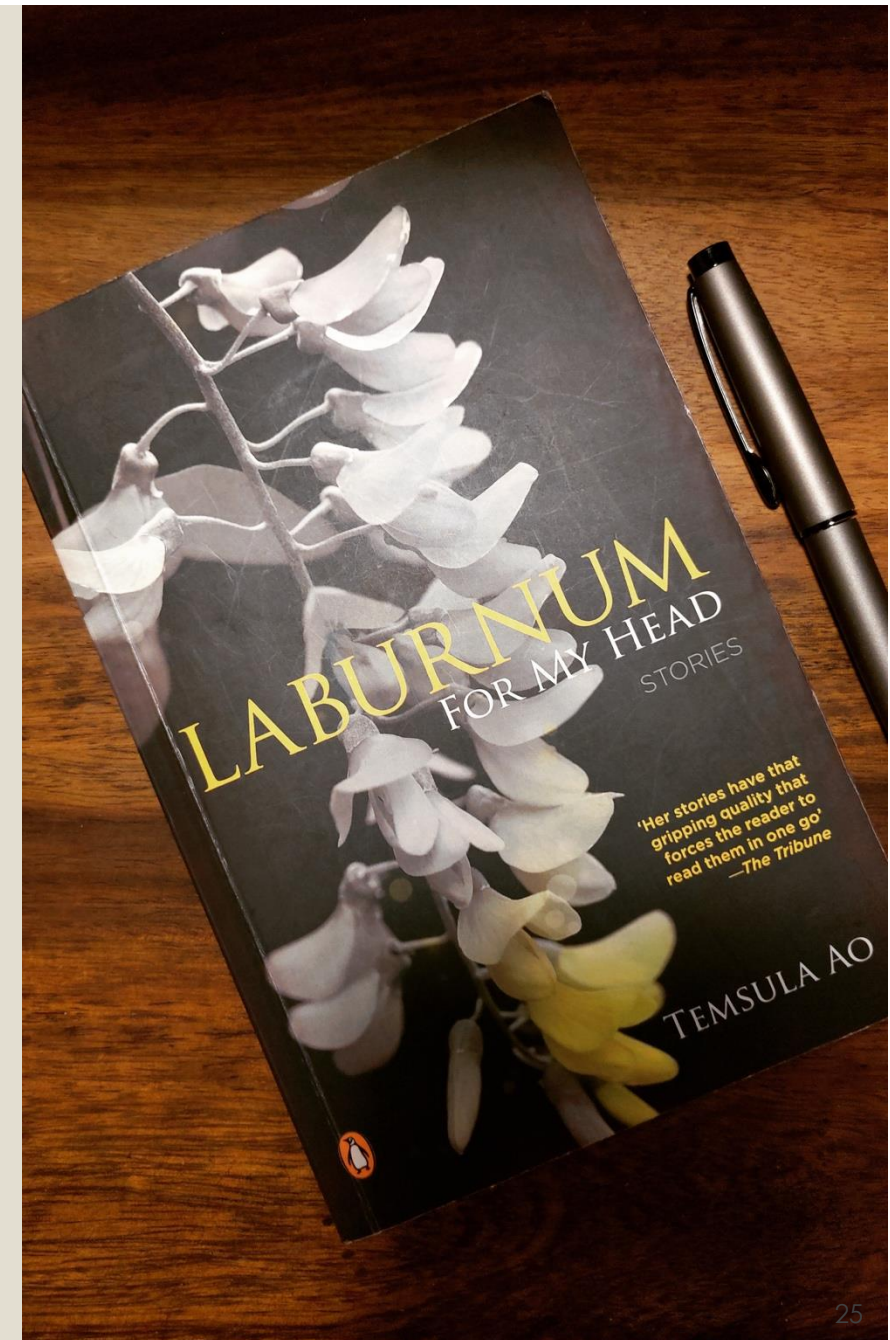
- What are characters driven by?
- How do they develop?
- How do they interact with each other?





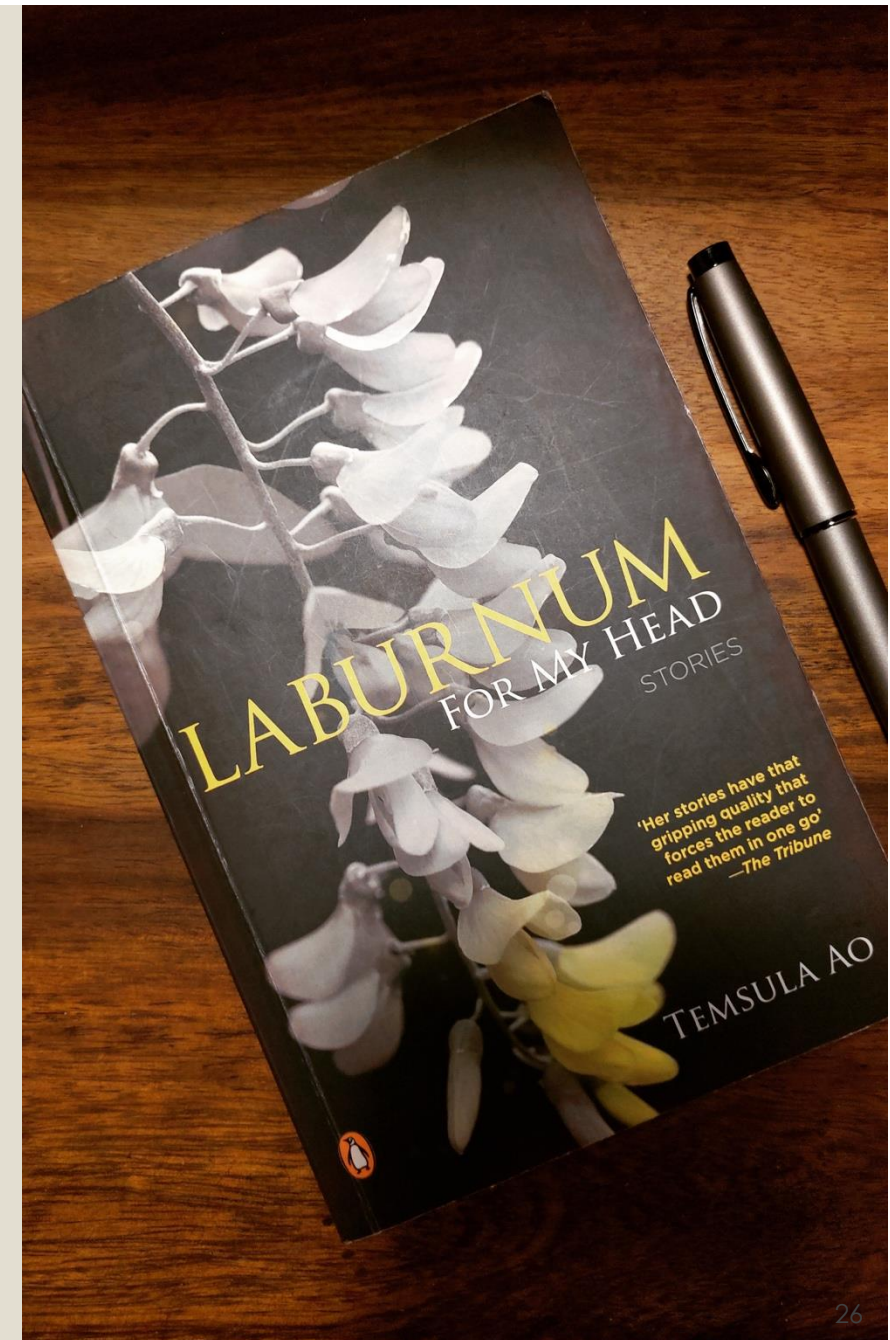
# Characters

- Who is Lentina? (class, age, social background, family, education)
- Who are we expected to sympathize with?
  - Her family, who think she is obsessed, or her?
  - How do we know?
  - Who are we rooting for?
  - What do we learn about characters, their motivations, thoughts?



# Characters

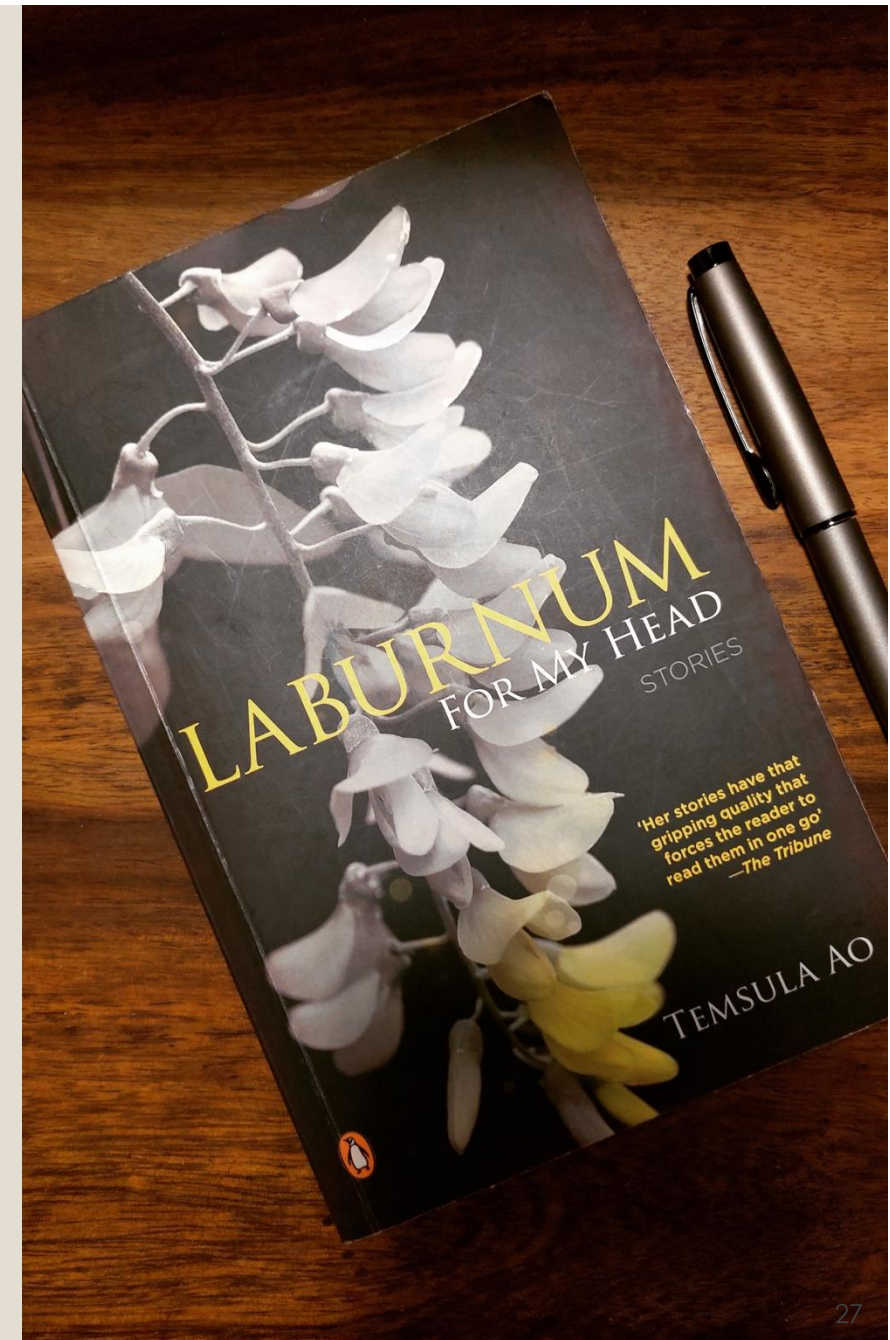
- Other characters:
  - Babu's son-in-law, Khalong's thoughts
    - furthers our understanding and builds textures around the story
  - Relationship between Lentina and Babu; relationship between Lentina and her family; relationship between Babu and the family
    - evolving and changing
  - Psychological insights into human nature: Khalong concerned about ethics but quotes more to her anyway! And Lentina knows that.
    - self-interest trumps ethics; priorities trump financial prudence





# Characters

- Narratorial persona
  - How much access do we have to other people's thoughts?
  - How involved is the narrator in telling the story? (personality of the narrator, extent of intrusion)







Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

# A Few Questions

Meditation on Death (**theme: abstract idea or concept**)  
through Lentina's obsession  
with Laburnum (**leitmotif/motif: recurring elements that refer to the theme**)

- A woman singularly driven and preoccupied with one idea, and what that tells us about the human condition: human beings; human heart; exploration of personality, family, and society through this theme.

# A Few Questions

- Death as a theme in the story:
  - Death as a theme – cemetery, death of plants, Lentina widowed, Babu widower.
  - “This consecrated ground has thus become choked with the specimens of human conceit” (1).



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



# A Few Questions

- Death as a theme in the story:
  - Contrast between living tree and its animation, demonstration and display of life – while the elaborate headstones arranged by people as marks of status or piety simply fail to compare.
  - Culture of death: “mourned and unmourned” – duty by “willing and unwilling offspring and relatives” (2).



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



# A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an  
undertone/overtone  
threading through the text  
(trope)



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

# A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- state of mind of Lentina – the way her character develops is told through her love for laburnum:
  - “She began to wonder about these accidents in her garden ever since she had planted the laburnum saplings” (3) → unsaid, something that cannot be rationally explained?
  - Human – smiles when she thinks of laburnum at her husband’s funeral.



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



# A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- How does the writer set up Lentina’s state of mind?
- What do you think of her state of mind?



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



# A Few Questions

**“After what seemed to be an arduous trek, she settled on a spot in the southernmost tip of the cemetery and began to nod her head, as if she had found what she was looking for. Babu was puzzled and was almost beginning to see what his young masters had said about madam losing her mind. When she gestured to him to approach, he went hesitantly. Motioning to him to walk faster, she pointed to the spot where she was standing ...” (6).**



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

# A Few Questions

- “fire and intensity in her eyes” (6)
  - Passion unsaid to people, even to Babu.
  - The resources that make themselves available to Lentina are set up in such a way that they suggest supernatural agents at work.



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



# A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- Her luck and the role of chance adds to the charm and the “strangeness” of the story: land just next to the cemetery
- “It was as if she were asking for candy, and not for a place where she would eventually be buried.” (13)



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



# A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- Khalong's land → narrative drive – narrative slowly and almost deterministically moves towards the fulfillment of her deep-seated longing.
- Walking barefoot without a shawl – 14. Detachment from family – seeks lone figures.
- Part of the strangeness of the story – “So every May, something extraordinary” (20).



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

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- Dubrow, Jennifer. *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Makings of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia*. U of Hawai’i P, 2018.