Vikram’s English Academy (ICSE)

***BOOKSHOP MEMORIES***

1. What struck the narrator? When?

A: When the narrator worked in a second-hand bookshop the thing that chiefly struck him was the rarity of really bookish people.

1. What according to the narrator can be easily pictured at a second-hand bookshop if one didn’t work there?

A: According to the narrator, if one didn’t work in a second-hand bookshop, it can be easily pictured, as a kind of paradise where charming old gentlemen browse eternally among calf-bound folios.

1. What was exceptional about the shop at which the narrator work? What did the narrator doubt?

A: The shop at which the narrator worked had an exceptionally interesting stock. The narrator doubted whether ten per cent of their consumers knew a good book from a bad one.

1. How does the narrator describe the common kinds of customers at their book store?

A: The narrator said that first edition snobs were much commoner than lovers of literature, but oriental students haggling over cheap textbooks were commenter still, and vague-minded women looking for birthday presents for their nephews were commonest of all.

1. What examples did the narrator give about the people who had special opportunities in a bookshop?

A: According to the narrator, many people who came to them were of the kind who would be a nuisance anywhere but had special opportunities in a bookshop. For instance, there would be a dear old lady who would want a book for an invalid (which was a common demand), and another dear old lady who read such a nice book in 1897 and wonders if one could find her a copy. Unfortunately, she doesn’t remember the title or the author's name or what the book was about, but she does remember that it had a red cover. Another is the decayed person smelling of old bread crusts who would come everyday, sometimes several times a day, and would try to sell someone worthless books. Also, there is a person who would order large quantities of books for which he has not the smallest intention of paying.

1. Who are the two well known types of pests by whom every second hand bookshop is haunted?

A: The first is the decayed person smelling of old bread crusts who would come everyday, sometimes several times a day, and would try to sell someone worthless books. The second is the person who would order large quantities of books for which he has not the smallest intention of paying.

1. What would the narrator do for the people who would arrange to fetch books later? Why?

A: The narrator would put books aside, or order them if necessary, for people who arranged to fetch them away later. He would do so because they sold nothing on credit.

1. What used to puzzle the narrator at first?

A: The fact that scarcely half the people who ordered books from the narrator ever came back to purchase those books. The narrator said that these people would come in and demand for some rare and expensive books and would make him promise over and over again to keep it for them, and then would vanish never to return.

1. How would the unmistakable paranoiacs talk?

A: The paranoiacs would talk in a grandiose manner about themselves and tell the most ingenious stories to explain how they happened to come out of doors without any money. In many cases the narrator was sure that the paranoiacs themselves believed the stories.

1. What does the narrator say about the not so certifiable lunatics walking on the streets of London?

A: According to the narrator, there were always plenty of quite not certifiable lunatics walking on the streets of London and they tend to gravitate towards bookshops, because a bookshop was one of the few places where one could hang about for a long time without spending any money. In the end, the narrator usually got to know these people almost at a glance. For all their big talk, there was something moth-eaten and aimless about them.

1. How did the narrator deal with obvious paranoiacs? Why?

A: Often when the narrator would deal with an obvious paranoiac, he would put aside the books he asked for and then put them back on the shelves the moment they had gone. He noticed that none of them ever attempted to take the books away without paying for them; merely to order them was enough for them because probably it gave them the illusion that they were spending real money.

1. What was the principal sideline of the bookshop at which the narrator worked?

A: The principal sideline of the bookshop at which the narrator worked was a lending library- the usual 'two-penny no-deposit' library of five or six hundred volumes, all fiction.

1. What according to the narrator is the easiest crime in the world?

A: According to the narrator, it is the easiest crime in the world to borrow a book at one shop for two pence, remove the label and sell it at another shop for a shilling.

1. What do the booksellers find that it generally pays them better? How many books did the narrator's shop lose each month?

A: Booksellers generally find that it pays them better to have a number of books stolen than to frighten customers away by demanding them a deposit. The narrator's shop used to lose about a dozen books each month.

1. What can be observed or seen in a lending library? What is the one thing that is striking about it?

A: In a lending library, one can see people’s real tastes and not their pretended ones. One thing that is striking about this is that how completely the 'classical' English novelists have dropped out of favour.

1. What is simply useless to put into the ordinary lending library? Why? What do people say looking at a nineteenth century novel?

A: It is simply useless to put Dickens, Thackeray, Austen, Trollope, etc. into the ordinary lending library because nobody takes them out. At the mere sight of a nineteenth century novel people say that it’s old and shy away immediately.

1. What are the noticeable aspects in a lending library?

A: The one striking thing is that the 'classical’ English novelists have dropped out of favour. Another thing that is very noticeable is the growing unpopularity of American books and short stories.

1. What instance does the narrator give regarding the growing unpopularity of short stories?

A: The narrator gives the instance of a German customer of theirs who would ask the librarian to choose a book for him then nearly would start by saying that he didn’t want short stories or he doesn’t desire little stories.

1. Why do people not like short stories? Why?

A: People on being asked why they don’t want short stories, they sometimes explain that it is too much fag to get used to a new set of characters with every story. They like to get into a novel which demands no further thought after the first chapter.

1. In spite of what reasons the narrator doesn’t want to become a bookseller by profession?

A: In spite of his employer's kindness towards him and some happy days he spent in the shop; he doesn’t want to become a bookseller by profession.

1. How is it that any educated person would be able to make a small secure living out of a book shop? Any difficulty that the owner might face, according to the narrator?

A: Given a good pitch and the right amount of capital, any educated person ought to be able to make a small secure living out of a bookshop. The only difficulty is of 'rare' books, otherwise it is not a difficult trade to learn. One would start at a great advantage if one knew anything about the inside of books.

1. What were the reasons why the narrator didn’t want to work as a bookseller?

A: The narrator felt that the hours of work were very long. He was only a part-time employee but his employer put in a seventy-hour week, apart from constant expeditions of hours to buy books which according to the narrator was an unhealthy life. Also, the narrator did not want to be in the book trade because while he was in it, he lost his love of books.

1. Why is a bookshop horribly cold in winter?

A: A bookshop is horribly cold in winter because if it is too warm the windows get misted over, and a bookseller lives on his windows. Books give off more and nastier dust than any other class of objects yet invented, and the top of a book is the place where every bluebottle prefers to die.

1. Why did the narrator lose his love for books?

A: The narrator lost his love for books while he worked as a bookseller. According to the narrator, a bookseller has to tell lies about books, and that gives him a distaste for them; still worse is the fact that he is constantly dusting them and hauling them to and fro.

1. What does the narrator describe about the time when he really did love books?

A: The narrator says that there was a time when he really did love books. He loved the sight and smell and the feel of them, at least if they were fifty or more years old. Nothing would please him as much as to buy a job lot of them for a shilling at a county auction. But as soon as he went to work in the bookshop, he stopped buying books.

1. What happened after he went to work in the bookshop?

A: As soon as the narrator went to work in the bookshop, he stopped buying books. As he saw them in the mass of five or ten thousand at a time, books seemed boring and even slightly sickening.

1. Does the narrator buy books nowadays? Does the sweet smell of decaying paper appeal to him? Why?

A: Yes, the narrator does buy a book occasionally nowadays but if it is a book that he wants to read and can’t borrow, because he never buys junk. No, the sweet smell of decaying paper appeals to him no longer. It is because it is too closely associated in his mind with paranoiac customers and dead bluebottles.