**In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens by Alice Walker - Summary**

Walker describes Jean Toomer's exploration of the Reconstruction South. Toomer found women sexually abused and lost, but who he saw to hold power, spirituality and beauty of which they were not aware. They were waiting for these unknowns to be made known. In the meantime they did not appreciate any aspects of life. These black women were artists whose creative forces were abandoned to the hardships of life.

Black women who were able to create such as Phillis Wheatley and Zora Hurston had divided loyalties, between black and white cultures. They were raised in both and their art is not genuinely hers but confused due to this. Many have criticized Wheatley's poetry for glorifying white people but Walker understands that art for Phyllis was a soulful practice and it sustained her.

This is not the end of the story, for the next generation of black women has survived. There is now the quest for black female identity. Society is not understanding of this strife.

The question arises of how so many women were in touch with their spirituality despite of the oppression and abuse.

Walker tells the story of her mother, who eloped at seventeen in the late 1920s. Walker is the youngest of eight children. Her mother worked tirelessly in the fields and at home all day. She found spirituality and creativity in her domestic undertakings, such as the planting of magnificent gardens, the only medium available to her. These expressions of creativity were anonymous, but they live on in Walker's stories. Not only the dry facts live on but their spirit. Walker feels an urgency to preserve them.

When her mother works in the garden, she is brilliant and radiant. She makes beauty within the poverty in which they lived. Such ability is characteristic of black women. Through this exploration of her mother's heritage she found her expressive creativity. In this way, many other mothers leave their marks on their children, and inspire them through the spirit and beauty that they recognized to create themselves.

**As One Listens To The Rain**

Summary

The speaker talks in first person and seems to be human when he mentions simple things such as, "entering my forehead" and "all five senses awake" and compares himself to rain, to "listen to me as one listens to the rain." In my opinion he seems to talking to a loved/female character seen by the words choice, such as “you are you and your body of steam, you and your face of night, you and your hair, unhurried lightning.” By experience when you hear the rain you acknowledge it and you know it’s there without needing to focus or see it, which is what I believe the author is trying to get through from the poem; however at the end of the poem the speaker is teary as he repeats to "listen to me as one listens to the rain."

Imagery/Figurative Language

Throughout the poem there is a lot of repetition such as “listen to me as one listens to the rain.” Octavio includes plenty of metaphors, in the 15th line he compares rain to light footsteps, “it's raining, light footsteps” giving the poem a lighter touch and comparing himself to something soft, since he compares himself to the rain. “steam rises and walks away, night unfolds and looks at me” this part of the poem compares steam going away as a human and night appearing as if in look for him. The metaphors go along with the contradiction pattern, how the speaker is rain and how other elements of nature are human alike in a way. The poem contends a lot of imagery such as “ eyes open inward", “ wet asphalt is shining, steam rises and walks away, night unfolds and looks at me” most of the imagery contradicts with itself, which makes the poem a bit more complicated, but gets the message straight to the point.

Tone

With the repetition of the quote “ listen to me as one listens to the rain”  it gives the poem a stronger tone, sort of in a begging,  wanting or in lust, but gets lighter and in a admiring or compassionate feel when the speaker begins to describe the loved one.  Until he asks/pleads one last time to "listen to me as one listens to the rain" and ends with him in discontent and in tears.

Theme

The poem doesn’t really have a deep message, but a sad story of someone who’s yearning for a loved one, in my opinion a female, and she’s not really listening or he wishes to know here more,depends on how you interpret it, and he wishes to have that connection with the person, like how one listens to rain and acknowledges its existence with no need to see it or hear it but by feeling.

After thoughts

After looking through the poem a thousand times, one can interpret the poem many ways and the one thing that stick out the most is the fact that he’s talking to a loved one. Whom he wishes for them to understand him but certain quotes in the poem stick out the fact that he can’t have them or was playing him in a way, the quote “ you are you and your body of steam.” The loved person is there but not complete and he wishes to know them more or to have more of them in a way that they’ll listen to them as if he were rain. “you cross the street and enter my forehead.” This quote makes it seem more likes it’s a lover or someone they lust for but can’t have, because they seem to be leaving them and yet when they “ cross the street” the lover enters their forehead (in other words, their thoughts) and it ends with “footsteps of water across my eyes, listen to me as one listens to the rain.” The Speaker is once again left and discontent knowing he can’t have this mystery person.

**"MEN IN DARK TIMES" BY HANNAH ARENDT**

One of the books that has traveled with me, from Vancouver to the Netherlands, to Cambodia and now to Montreal, is Hannah Arendt's Men in Dark Times. It's a book unlike her more renowned works, and its subject is other people and other lives. Published in 1968, Men in Dark Times Times is a collection of essays on writers and philosophers, from Erich Lessing and Walter Benjamin, to Bertolt Brecht, Hermann Broch and Isak Dinesen.For me, the book is about poetry and the writer, der Dichter. As Broch writes, "poetry, if it is to lead to the purification and self-identification of man, has to plunge into the depths of man's antinomies, quite in contrast to philosophy, which remains on the brink of the abyss." Arendt sets her sights on these antinomies--the paradoxes that inhabit us, and the disharmonies that shape our lives and our relationships with one another.

In my own life, these antinomies have drawn me back, again and again, to storytelling. In stories we know that many truths can exist at once, say the truth of Zerline in Hermann Broch's anguished, brilliant masterpiece, Zerline's Tale, alongside the truth of her lover and her lover's lover. Zerline's motivations, innocent, malicious or mad, break against each other like glass fragments, no longer able to cohere but still part of the same entirety. Broch shows us, as Arendt says, how "storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it."

In Men in Dark Times, Arendt folds together narrative, criticism and rhetoric. First, there is the biography she is telling (Brecht, the genius, capable of telling us the most unwelcome truths, carving out his life from Augsburg to Svendborg to Santa Monica and finally to East Berlin), then literary criticism ("There is not a shred of sentimentality left in Brecht's beautiful and beautifully precise definition of a refugee: 'Ein Bote des Unglücks' "), and finally the rhetoric ("It was precisely this extraordinary intelligence, breaking like lightning through the rumble of Marxist platitudes, that has made it so difficult for good men to forgive Brecht his sins"). Through Brecht, through his plays, poetry, and the trajectory of his life, she focuses, bit by bit, on goodness. How did it come to pass, she asks, that a good man, no, the best of men, lived in comfort in East Berlin, under a regime that had killed his friends? Is it true that "it will be of greater consequence to leave behind you a better world than to have been good?"

These antinomies are what Arendt excels at illuminating, and she unfurls these contradictions with her particular savage intellect and her intense, moving compassion.

Often, these days, I worry about my own love of literature and my belief in the writing life. In Hermann Broch's acceptance of the "ultimate insufficiency of literature", I hear my own doubts magnified a thousand times over. Men in Dark Times remains in me like a corridor branching off to many unlit rooms, and in each room there is a person thinking to him or herself, a person creating work, a person in constant engagement with the ideas of others. The beauty of this book is, for me, that we are all in these rooms, and only in the discourse, in this passionate engagement, can we find our way to one another.

**Girl by Jamaica Kincaid**

In Girl by Jamaica Kincaid we have the theme of powerlessness, domesticity, independence, identity, inequality, sexuality, freedom, tradition and control. Narrated in the first person by an unnamed narrator (mother) the reader realises after reading the story that Kincaid may be exploring the theme of powerlessness. There is a sense that the narrator’s daughter is powerless when it comes to the instructions given to her. She is not allowed to have an opinion on how she should do things. This might be important as Kincaid by removing the daughter’s voice may be highlighting the fact that the daughter is being taught how to adhere to tradition. A tradition which may or may not be beneficial to the daughter. She is after all being taught to live a life of domesticity and appears to be under the complete control of her mother. It is also interesting that the daughter is being advised against any exploration of her sexuality with her mother considering any deviation from how she is being taught as being the actions of a slut. This may be significant as the mother appears to wish to mould her daughter in her own likeness. Something which would further play on the theme of control and also on the theme of identity.

Though the daughter’s voice can only be heard twice in the story it may be important that when she speaks her mother disregards what the daughter has said. It is as though the mother is imposing her will on her daughter. There is no sense that the daughter has a choice. If anything she has no freedom. Which may be the point that Kincaid is attempting to make. She may be suggesting that the following of tradition is fine but an individual still needs to be allowed to have their independence. In the latter half of the story the mother is automatically assuming that the daughter will marry and as such instructs her on how to love a man. It is as though there is an imbalance when it comes to gender. With the daughter due to the fact that she is female not being allowed a voice or choice. She is to be subservient to the male. Just as the daughter is silent throughout most of the story. Likewise there is a sense that she is to be silent or submissive in life. Particularly should she marry. Which may leave many readers to believe that the mother is condoning or accepting that there is an inequality between the sexes.

If anything the daughter’s life is being mapped out for her by her mother and she is to be both a housewife and mother. Any aspirations that the daughter might have to be something different are not entertained. Tradition is being adhered to at the cost of the daughter’s independence. The title of the story may also be important as it reminds the reader that the daughter is still only a girl. She is not a woman. Yet her mother is predefining what her role in life will be. If anything there is a sense that the daughter is not being allowed to live her life. It is as though the mother forgets that her daughter is still just a girl or child. She is being made to conform to her mother’s way of life before she has had the chance to grow up and decide upon which type of life she herself might like to live. The whole story is also similar to a to-do list with the reader aware that the mother is instructing her daughter on how to live her life. Before the daughter has even lived her life.

It is also interesting that the daughter does not rebel against her mother. She asks her two questions but appears to accept everything that her mother has said to her. Which leaves the reader thinking that rather than finding her own place in life the daughter will do as her mother has instructed her to do. There is no sense that the daughter has any choice. Where one would expect an individual to rebel in some way against their parents. This is not the case with the daughter. She is compliant with everything that her mother tells her. Which may leave some critics to suggest that the daughter respects her mother. However it is more likely that Kincaid is highlighting the fact that the daughter is under the complete control of her mother. Just as her voice is limited in the story. Likewise in life the daughter’s voice is also being limited. If anything the mother is dictating a set of rules to her daughter all of which must be adhered to and the daughter appears to be accepting of these rules. The reader left suspecting that should the daughter live her life to her mother’s instructions she will be living the life her mother wants her to live. Which may not necessarily be the same life that the daughter really wants to live.

**An Avenger by Anton Chekhov**

In An Avenger by Anton Chekhov we have the theme of infidelity, trust, revenge, shame and pride Taken from his The Complete Short Stories collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and from the beginning of the story it becomes clear to the reader that Chekhov may be exploring the theme of infidelity. Sigaev’s wife has been unfaithful to him. Hence his visit to the gun shop. Sigaev wants to exact revenge on both his wife and his wife’s lover. However it is also noticeable that at times he also considers killing himself after he has killed his wife and her lover. This may be important as Sigaev appears to be looking for sympathy from others when it comes to killing himself. He wants to let others know that he is the offended party. That he himself has done nothing wrong and that the onus of responsibility lies with his wife and her lover. They are the guilty parties and their tryst or romantic engagements have driven him to the point of madness. Which killing himself, his wife and his lover would be. It would be insanity for Sigaev to kill himself of his wife or her lover over the fact that his wife has been unfaithful. Something that becomes clearer to Sigaev towards the end of the story when he decides that the proper course of action is to divorce and shame his wife.

Though Chekhov gives no background as to why Sigaev’s wife might have been unfaithful it is clear that Sigaev cannot trust his wife. What is also interesting is the fact that Chekhov also gives no background into Sigaev. The reader is left to take his word on everything. Only his feelings are felt throughout the story. Though it is clear his pride is wounded the reader never knows if Sigaev’s potential actions are justified. We do not know how Sigaev has treated his wife. Which leaves the reader wondering is it possible that Sigaev’s wife’s actions were triggered by the fact she feels as though she is in an unhappy marriage. The reader never knows. As Chekhov throughout the story is focused on Sigaev’s feelings about what has happened. Sigaev also appears to be more interested in how he will be perceived should he kill himself. Will he be viewed upon as the wounded party? Shaming his wife and her lover.

It might also be important that Chekhov affords Sigaev the opportunity to think things through. He may not necessarily be acting on impulse. Something that is clearer by the fact that he decides upon divorce rather than the action of killing himself, his wife and her lover. By not acting on impulse Sigaev is able to think clearly about the course of action he will take. At the end of the day he wishes to be seen by society as the one who has been offended. That is utmost in Sigaev’s mind. The outrage that Sigaev feels at the beginning of the story also seems to lessen as the story progresses. It as though Sigaev longs to make a decision that will not only ensure he is viewed upon sympathetically by society but that he will also come out on top. It is as though he can’t let go of what has happened. Though any man or woman may have difficulty letting go of their spouse’s infidelity. If anything Sigaev is a proud man. Rather than discussing what has happened to him with his wife and seeking some form of reconciliation. He appears to have a knee jerk reaction. Hence his thoughts about purchasing a pistol.

Sigaev’s indecision about which pistol to purchase not only buys him some time to think a little more clearly but his indecision also mirrors the course of action that Sigaev intends to take. From going from killing himself, his wife and her lover. Sigaev takes the more sensible approach and decides upon divorce. Affording himself the opportunity to be viewed upon sympathetically by others. It is as though Sigaev’s only real complaint is the fact that his pride is wounded. Though it is inappropriate to conduct a relationship with another person’s wife or husband. Sigaev does not at any stage in the story think that he might be at fault and it is also difficult for the reader to suggest that Sigaev is at fault. As mentioned Chekhov gives no background to Sigaev’s relationship with his wife. The entire story is focused upon how Sigaev feels and the importance of him being seen in a good light. Sigaev does not appear to mourn the fact that his wife has been unfaithful. Rather revenge is more important to Sigaev. Making his wife and her lover feel as he is feeling. As though this will solve the problem for Sigaev. In reality Sigaev should probably follow the course of action he decides upon at the end of the story (divorce). However he still longs to be viewed upon as the injured or wounded party. Though again it is difficult not to view Sigaev in any other light considering that Chekhov only gives the reader limited information.

**Marriage is a Private Affair by Chinua Achebe**

In Marriage is a Private Affair by Chinua Achebe we have the theme of modernity, tradition, control, conflict, stubbornness, gender roles, independence, change and remorse. Taken from his Girls at War and Other Stories collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and from the beginning of the story the reader realises that Achebe may be exploring the theme of modernity and tradition. Though both Nnaemeka and Nene live in Lagos, a modern city in Nigeria, Nnaemeka is very much aware of the importance of tradition particularly when it comes to his father Okeke. Who has arranged for Nnaemeka to marry a girl from his village despite the fact that Nnaemeka is due to marry Nene. If anything there is a sense of conflict between both father and son. With Nnaemeka following a more modern path to marriage and rather than having a wife chosen for him by his father prefers instead to choose who he is to marry. Something that is lost on Okeke who prefers to follow the traditional values that are held by those in the village. There is also a sense that Nnaemeka wishes to control his own life (and destiny) rather than follow the traditions that his father abides to. Something that Okeke does not understand or seems to refuse to understand such is the depth of his adherence to tradition.

Throughout the story Okeke also shows signs of being stubborn. Refusing to even acknowledge Nene either before or after she marries Nnaemeka. So deep is his dislike for Nene that he returns the wedding photo sent to him by Nnaemeka with Nene’s image removed from the photograph. Symbolically this may be important as it suggests that Okeke does not give any recognition to Nene. As far as he is concerned she does not exist and is not Nnaemeka’s wife. Which would further highlight to the reader just how important tradition is to Okeke. Rather than seeing his son happy he remains rooted to tradition. It may also be significant that some of the other men in the village suggest that Nnaemeka should see one of the native doctors as this would also further play on the theme of tradition. The fact that the women of the village (who live in Lagos) are overly polite to Nene may also be important as it suggests they are deliberately alienating Nene and if anything it would suggest that the women believe that Nene is not one of them.

What is also interesting about the story is the role that women play in the village. Ugoye is chosen by Okeke to marry Nnaemeka. She is given no option and is following the dictate of her father and Okeke. Also there is no mention of Okeke having a wife or Nnaemeka having a mother. This may be deliberate as Achebe could be suggesting that rather than Okeke being a widower his wife has no input (like Ugoye). In essence the women of the village are silent. The only woman in the story who has an independent voice is Nene and she does not live in the village. In essence Achebe could be suggesting that just as Okeke wants to control who Nnaemeka marries likewise the women who live in the village are also being controlled by the men in the village. No equality may exist between male and female within the village. The reality being that life in the village may revolve around traditional gender roles with the male being dominant. Whereas in Lagos Nene as mentioned has her own voice and is not hindered by Nnaemeka. She is allowed to express herself. Something that becomes clearer to the reader through Nene’s letter writing to Okeke.

The end of the story is also interesting as Achebe appears to be exploring the theme of change and remorse. When Okeke discovers that he has two grandchildren his view of Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage changes dramatically. No longer is he against the marriage and it is noticeable that Okeke begins to fear that his isolation of Nene has resulted in him also shutting out his grandchildren from his life. It may also be symbolically significant that it is raining when Okeke beings to change his opinion on Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage. Quite often in literature a writer will use the rain as symbolism for change or renewal and this seems to be very much the case in the story. The fact that Achebe mentions in the final line of the story that Okeke feels remorse may also be important as it suggests that not only has Okeke’s opinion of Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage changed but Okeke may also be conscious that he has been wrong. That his own stubbornness and traditional view on marriage has resulted in him alienating his son, Nene and his two grandchildren. At the end of the story there is a sense that not only has Okeke changed his views on Nnaemeka and Nene’s marriage but he may also have changed as a person.

**The Train From Rhodesia Summary**

“The Train from Rhodesia” (1952) is one of Nobel Prize winning author Nadine Gordimer’s earliest published short stories. It appeared in her debut work, The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories (1952). This short story collection established her as one of the leading white critics of aparthied in South Africa. While the plot of the story concerns a train stopping in, and then leaving, a poverty-stricken African town, the text is loaded with heavy symbolism that evole the complex politics of southern Africa region, especially after the imposition of apartheid, which forcibly segregated white and black populations in South Africa, leaving the majority black population disenfranchised and impoverished.

The story’s themes include shame, unequal relations between different races, and the dynamics of exploitation.

The story is written in present tense, which mimics the speed of the on-rushing train of the story’s title. Though told in the third person, the perspective changes throughout, shifting among the viewpoints of various black and white people. It is set in a land north of South Africa, Rhodesia, which was a British self-governing colony from 1923 to 1965. Presently, the territory is roughly the equivalent of Zimbabwe. It is landlocked, and throughout the 20th century, was marked by intense civil and international wars. Zimbabwe’s longest-serving president, Robert Mugabe, is generally recognized as a dictator with a long history of human rights violations. He held absolute power from 1987-2017.

The short story opens as a train moves towards a small village along a single train track. The stationmaster prepares to greet the visitors. His children run around barefoot. Chickens and dogs also run through the unordered landscape. Gordimer describes how shadows “lapped all around, from sky to sky, cast[ing] little rhythmical cups of shadow, so that the sand became the sea, and closed over the children’s black feet softly and without imprint.” The wife of the stationmaster sits in the shade, with a recently captured animal carcass swaying behind her.

Once the train docks in the station, it temporarily becomes a part of the town. Merchants share their artwork with the train’s passengers; the children ask the travellers for money; the dogs linger around the train kitchen which smells like onions and meat.

A young white woman is on the train travelling through Africa with her husband, who is also young and white. The young woman talks to an old “native” man about purchasing a miniature model of a lion. She especially likes how a hint of fur is wrapped around its immobile neck. Eventually she says it’s too much money. When the old man consents to a lower price, the young woman thinks that, as a tourist, she has already bought enough trinkets, including wooden hippos and elephants. She worries they might look ridiculous at home and would lose the novelty they had in Africa. The couple end up buying nothing from the old man.

A bell sounds, alerting everyone to the train’s imminent departure. Some men who had been stretching their legs on the station platform, jump back on board. For many of the passengers on board, leaving the small, rural train station doesn’t mean anything. Many are tipsy with beer and don’t pay attention to what’s going on outside of their window.

The train starts moving. At the last second, the young white husband indignantly throws money from the train to the old man. The old man throws the toy lion up to them through the window. All of the villagers watch the train go. The narrator makes the notable decision to describe the children as “piccanins,” which is an offensive term for black children in South Africa, but one that accurately represented the feelings of some of the white passengers.

Back on the train, the young white man gives his wife the toy lion he just purchased. He says that he was just bargaining with the old man for fun, and at the last minute the old man ran after the train agreeing to his terms and conditions (even though it was he, the young man, who made the final offer). His wife doesn’t take kindly to this: she thinks he should have dealt with the old man honestly and purchased the lion for a fair price.

The husband counters that she was the one who said it was too expensive, anyway. The young wife throws the lion into the seat. She is angry with her husband, but mostly with herself, for her role in this exploitation. She considers what a nice piece of art the lion is: the carving is exact, the tail looks real, the teeth are ferocious, and the tongue is black and sinuous like the sea. In any other place, the work of such a talented artist would fetch a far higher price. She sits down, and is increasingly filled with shame.

The short story ends with the trains arrrival and departure as told from the villagers’ perspective. The narrator says the train had come into the station, taken what it wanted, then cast it off like an old skin. The train symbolizes the modern, western world’s economic power over Rhodesia’s inhabitants, as well as its habitual disregard for the dignity of black people.