



Apperciation

1. Discuss the manner in which the author interweaves details of the narrator's family with the flow of the main narrative.

Answer: The details about the narrator's family is important for the readers in order to understand the psyche of the narrator. He had a very turbulent childhood and was brought up among very disturbed conditions at home. This is important for us to understand the bond he shared with Mrs. Croft. The words written by the author expresses that he was very attached to his mother and had fulfilled the role of an eldest son till the time she was cremated. He missed his mother a lot and recollected small incidents about she never forgetting to drape her head before coming in front of his father. When he came to know of Mrs. Croft's age which had crossed a century, he contemplated on how his mother couldn't adjust to his father's death and turned insane. Her insanity led to deterioration of her health. Her death gave him a heavy blow but he cared for her till the very last moment before cremating her. This shows his reason for growth of empathy towards Mrs. Croft because of her old age. Thus, his concern for Mrs. Croft grew which can be clearly reflected in the line: I was mortified. I had assumed Mrs. Croft was in her eighties...that this person was a widow who lived alone mortified me further still.

2. 'Mrs Croft's was the first death I mourned in America, for, hers was the first life I had admired; she had left this world at last, ancient and alone, never to return'—how do these lines encapsulate the bond that is possible between two strangers?

Answer: A person usually feels very detached from people staying around him abroad. Here is where originates the feeling of diaspora. The same happened with the narrator. He was away from his home and his family and, thus, never grew any feeling of affection towards anybody in America. He was quite alienated with the people of America. However, the course of action justifies his attachment and the emotional bonding which grew between him and Mrs Croft. In the foreign land, he grew a fondness towards the old lady because of various reasons. When he got to know that she was older than a century, he felt a sense of responsibility towards her. He was amazed and was quite awestruck at the idea of a widow of that age residing all alone, with nobody to take care of her. Taking up chores like heating her soup every evening or giving her eight dollars in the envelope every month satisfied him. All these instances and many more cite the fact that a very strong bond had developed between the lady and the narrator.

3. Examine the pieces of conversation in the story. How do they reflect the world view of each of the speakers?

Answer: The various conversations taking place in bits and pieces during the course of action of the story reflect a lot about people's perception on various issues and attitude towards each other and humanity in general. We see a very firm and hypocritical attitude prevalent in the tone of Mrs Croft when the narrator arrived at her place for the first time. This is when for the first time he realised that belonging to a very high standard place was important, anywhere such as Tech or Harvard. The greatness and biasness of Americans to be the first one to step on the moon, considering it an

unattainable and impossibly splendid feat to be attained. However, she becomes mild for the first time when she receives the eight dollars from the narrator. Mrs Croft's orthodox ways become prominently visible when she objects to a lady and a man talking in private without a chaperone. Her conventional ways are quite evident keeping in mind the fact that she had already crossed hundred. The ways of the western world is shown to be in a very high contrast when we see Mrs Croft's daughter Helen being quite indifferent towards her mother's health or meals. Her casual tone when she says "she might have slipped" might disturb readers. However, even with the differences in opinions, perceptions and norms, the bond which had developed between the narrator and an American widow of a hundred years is worth appreciation.

4. There are many instances of gentle humour in the story. Point out some of these and state how this contributes to the interest of the narration.

Answer: Few instances of gentle humour which contributed to the interest of the narration were:

- When Mrs Croft said with disbelief and delight after meeting Mala: She is a perfect lady. The gentle laugh the couple shared at this moment was very important although quite subtle.
- The old lady asking it repeatedly everyday: 'A flag on the moon! Isn't that splendid?' and the compulsion with which the author used to reply: "Splendid!"
- There was a point in the story when Mrs Croft expressed the fact that she didn't accept the physical proximity between a male and a female. She found improper for a lady and gentleman who are not married to one another to hold a private conversation without a chaperone! The situation portrayed here might seem amusing.

Language Work

1. 'Don't expect an English cup of tea'—how does this phrase bring out the contrast between the English and American attitudes?

Answer: Britishers are supposedly more polite and hospitable to their guests as compared to Americans. The pace in which the lives of Americans rush is quite different and, in fact, faster than people residing in Britain. The feeling of competition is so immense that 'Everybody feels he must get to the top.'

2. How did the narrator learn to distinguish between 'a flask' and 'a thermos'?

Answer: There was a time when the narrator went to buy tea bags and a 'flask'. This is when he came to know that the thing which he was looking for was actually known as a 'thermos' and 'flask' was something which was used to store Whisky. The reason for the narrator having limited knowledge on the subject was the fact that he hadn't consumed whisky till then.

3. It took the narrator quite some time to understand that what he heard as 'piper', in fact, meant 'paper' and the phrase 'mind the gap' in the Tube. What do you think caused the problem?

Answer: The narrator had the mentioned problems with his language when he shifted to US because in the beginning it was a new language for him to speak. He was not habituated to speaking fluently in any language other than his own mother tongue, i.e. Bengali. Also, the pronunciation was quite different from how it was spoken in London, where he stayed before moving to US.

4. Make a list of items that are referred to differently in British and American English, for example, 'lift' (BE) 'elevator' (AmE).

Answer: Few words which are spelt differently in British and American English are:

1. Barrister (BE) : Attorney (AE)
2. The cinema (BE) : The movies (AE)
3. Flat (BE) : Apartment (AE)
4. Holiday (BE) : Vacation (AE)
5. Lavatory (BE) : Bathroom (AE)
6. Lift (BE) : Elevator (AE)
7. Favour (BE) : Favor (AE)
8. Wardrobe (BE) : Dresser (AE)
9. Barrister (BE) : Lawyer (AE)
10. Windscreen (BE) : Wind shield (AE)

5. See if you understand what the following words that are parts of a house mean. Look up the dictionary if you don't.

- parlour
- foyer
- lounge
- porch
- lobby
- attic
- portico

Answer:

- Parlour – It means a small room for guests away from the public rooms in an inn, club, etc. In a house, in old fashioned English, parlour meant the living room especially kept neat and tidy for reception of visitors.
- foyer – Foyer means a vestibule or entrance hall in a house or apartment. Foyer could also refer to the lobby of a theatre, hotel, or apartment house.
- Lounge – A lobby or a living room might also be referred to as a lounge in a house. However, lounge also means a sofa for reclining, sometimes backless, having a headrest at one end.
- Porch – A porch refers to a verandah. It is the open space or the extended enclosed space in front and on the sides of a building.
- Lobby – It is a hall or a waiting room at or near the entrance to a building. It is a corridor or a vestibule which usually serve as a space to an entry into a larger room.
- Attic – Attic is that part of a building, especially of a house, directly under a roof. It is a story or room directly below the roof of a building, especially a house.
- Portico – A structure consisting of a roof supported by columns or piers, usually attached to a building as a porch is called a portico.

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