



Trial Examination 2023

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**Sample Essays**

## **QCE English Units 3&4**

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## ABOUT THE SAMPLE ESSAYS

The sample essays in this booklet are not intended to be prescriptive. Each essay represents one possible way to construct an informed and critical perspective in response to the question. It is recommended that these essays are dissected as learning tools rather than taken as exact models of what should be replicated in exam conditions.

For your reference, these essays include page numbers or act/scene numbers for direct textual quotations, though students are not expected to include these in their external assessment essays. The quotations are taken from the following editions.

- Kent, Hannah (2013) *Burial Rites*, Picador, Sydney.
- Shakespeare, William (2012) *Hamlet*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Brontë, Charlotte (1999) *Jane Eyre*, Wordsworth Classics, London.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo (2005) *Never Let Me Go*, Faber and Faber, London.
- Shakespeare, William (2013) *Macbeth*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
- McGahan, Andrew (2004) *The White Earth*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.
- Winch, Tara June (2021) *The Yield*, Penguin Books, Australia.
- Fowler, Karen Joy (2014) *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Serpent's Tail, London.

The assessment instrument is used to determine student achievement in the following objectives.

1. use patterns and conventions of an analytical essay to respond to an unseen question/task
2. establish and maintain the role of essay writer and relationships with readers
3. analyse perspectives and representations of concepts, identities, times and places in a literary text
4. analyse the ways cultural assumptions, attitudes, values and beliefs underpin a literary text and invite audiences to take up positions
5. analyse the effects of aesthetic features and stylistic devices in a literary text
6. select and synthesise subject matter to support perspectives in an essay response to an unseen question/task
7. organise and sequence subject matter to achieve particular purposes
8. use cohesive devices to emphasise ideas and connect parts of an essay
9. make language choices for particular purposes in an essay
10. use grammar and language structures for particular purposes in an essay
11. use written features to achieve particular purposes in an essay

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## SAMPLE ESSAYS

### *Burial Rites* by Hannah Kent

a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of justice in *Burial Rites*?

In Hannah Kent's novel *Burial Rites*, the reader is invited to view the concept of justice as deeply flawed and subject to the prejudices of humanity. Kent's portrayal of the state-sanctioned execution of the protagonist Agnes encourages readers to view her as a victim rather than a perpetrator, as she is subjected to callous treatment and marginalisation fuelled by gossip and societal biases. The novel's complex characterisation of Agnes and the surrounding characters, as well as the juxtaposition of personal revelations with historical documents, serve to underscore the injustice of Agnes's fate while also highlighting the unreliability of memories and accounts of the past. Furthermore, Kent's portrayal of the authority figures in the novel – supposedly representatives of justice – as bloodthirsty and punitive also strengthens her critique of an unjust justice system.

Throughout the novel, Agnes is shown to be a victim of discrimination and mistreatment that arise from rumours and societal prejudice. Despite her efforts to avoid causing harm to others, Agnes is constantly met with indifference and hostility from those around her. The character of Róslín epitomises the rampant rumour-mongering that leads to the erroneous conclusion that Agnes is a vile murderess worthy of contempt. She feigns sympathy for Margrét for 'having to keep a *murderess* under [her] family's roof!' and 'being forced to look at her hideous face every day!' (p. 66). Róslín, and by extension the broader societal sentiment towards Agnes, is so steeped in preconceptions that any efforts by Margrét to gently dispel the hyperbole are met with a refusal to listen. Thus, Kent draws attention to the inability of otherwise rational characters to rein in the frenzy of fear and gossip that leads Róslín to the erroneous conclusion that 'Agnes is the worst of the three convicted', simply because this is the general consensus that '[f]olks are saying' (p. 67). Róslín's comments underscore how prejudices can pre-empt any hopes for justice in a ruthless, unforgiving society that fails to consider the subjectivity of circumstances. Moreover, Agnes is unable to escape the confines of societal preconceptions that she is an archetypal 'witch caught in the webbing of her own fateful weaving' (p. 29–30), highlighting the unfairness in her inability to disprove these rumours. Thus, Kent suggests that the tragedy of Agnes' death is made all the more cruel by her living her final days as 'a dead woman, destined for the grave' (p. 35) due to the actions of a callous and punitive judicial system.

Kent's portrayal of the authority figures within this system strengthens her depiction of an unjust and even bloodthirsty society. Their attitude towards Agnes exacerbates her outsider status and only deepens their conviction that her execution is justifiable, which is epitomised by the belief that 'He that Smiteth a Man so that he Die, shall be surely put to Death' (p. 6). Blöndal's brutal pragmatism is made abundantly clear as readers are shown how he uses the pending execution to reify his power over people. Contextually, his declaration that Agnes is 'a woman loose with her emotions, and looser with her morals' (p. 170) is especially distasteful to a contemporary readership who understand that a woman's moral worth should not be tied to stigmas and accusations of promiscuity. Nevertheless, this represents the systemic biases that exist against Agnes and similarly outcast women in a patriarchal society. Some characters, such as the Jónsson family, gradually soften in their regard for Agnes and eventually find her worthy of empathy and kindness. This is even evident in Lauga who was initially hesitant in accepting Agnes's intrusion into their family unit but ends the novel overwhelmed with sympathy for her circumstances. Although Lauga struggles to articulate her feelings, her gesture of gifting her brooch to Agnes is a potent symbol of compassion and connection that validates Agnes's innate value. By contrast, Blöndal remains steadfast in his belief that Agnes is only deserving of execution. Through this stark juxtaposition of the capacity for compassion, Kent highlights the abject failures of a justice system that cannot be impartial or humane.

The novel's structure also underscores the injustice of Agnes's fate. Kent deliberately juxtaposes chapters with Agnes and Tóti sharing intimate, personal revelations with her inclusion of historical documents. On the surface, these provide authenticity and depth to the plot, but on a deeper level, they draw readers' attention to the officially authorised condemnation and maltreatment of Agnes – a callous response that the readers perceive as outrageous given how sympathetic both we and Tóti become to her plight.

For instance, Blöndal makes frequent use of epithets like ‘the criminal’ (p. 160) in his letters to Tóti; his judgemental nature coupled with the extremely formal tone are emblematic of a rigid justice system devoid of sympathy. Blöndal even disapprovingly remarks that Tóti ‘call[s] her by her Christian name’ instead of sharing in his use of loaded terms like ‘the condemned’ (p. 163). Kent’s use of interpolation therefore evokes in readers a sense of disquiet over the justification for Agnes’s sentence. This is strengthened by her inclusion of many mitigating and complicating factors surrounding the Illugastadir murders, such as Natan’s abuse of Sigga, his betrayal of Agnes, and the fact that Agnes stabbing Natan was an act of mercy after Fridrik inflicts grievous wounds but leaves him to ‘slowly die’ (p. 302). By gradually revealing these details to readers over the course of the novel, Kent implies that unearthing the truth requires an emotional investment, whereas basing judgements on subjective accounts and first impressions invariably leads to unjust outcomes.

Ultimately, *Burial Rites* invites the reader to regard the fate of Agnes as unjust, marred by societal prejudices, gender norms and close-mindedness. Through her evocative and complex examination of justice, Kent challenges readers to question their own assumptions and biases, and to consider the morality of execution and the value of human life in societies past and present.

**Burial Rites by Hannah Kent**

- b) Analyse the significance of Agnes's family in shaping her character.

*Burial Rites* explores the long-lasting impacts of familial neglect and emotional abandonment. In particular, Kent depicts the character of Agnes as being irrevocably shaped by her experiences with parental figures throughout her formative years. Agnes is subjected to harsh treatment and marginalisation throughout her life, and the root of these challenges can be traced back to her abandonment by her family. However, Agnes also endeavours to define herself and establish a moral compass in spite of their absence, finding a sense of family and belonging with sympathetic characters such as the Jónssons and Tóti. Thus, Kent suggests that although Agnes's biological family has a lingering effect on her character, she eventually finds the strength to shape her own character.

Initially, Agnes is characterised by her isolation from all forms of family and human connection. In one of Agnes and Tóti's first conversations, she coldly remarks, 'I have no family' (p. 99). He is then 'taken aback' by Agnes's laughter when she confides that her mother '[j]ust upped and left one day [...] I don't know anything about my mother. I wouldn't recognise her if I saw her' (p. 107). However, Kent establishes overt parallels between the lives of Agnes and her mother Ingveldur. Both women are unfairly shamed by a patriarchal, hypocritical society that judges them for engaging in premarital sex even though they 'did what any number of women do harmlessly in secret' (p. 108). In spite of Agnes's emotional distance from Ingveldur, she nevertheless withholds her own judgement, telling Tóti that 'the only things I know about my mother are what other people have told me [...] To know what a person has done, and to know who a person is, are very different things' (p. 107). Through this, readers understand that Agnes has endeavoured to set aside some of her past trauma and glean important moral lessons in her mother's absence.

However, Agnes's sympathies do not extend to her paternal figures, who play a more sinister role in shaping her worldview. This is exemplified by the revelation that Agnes is unsure who her real father is – though she is certain that neither Magnús Magnússon, who is listed on her birth certificate, nor Jón of Brekkukot, a married man Agnes believes to be her real father, took adequate responsibility for her. She and her mother experience the instability of '[c]ountless badstofas belonging to other men' (p. 121) and although Agnes does not resent her mother for seeking respite from poverty, she does acknowledge that herself, Jóas and Helga having different fathers resulted in a sense of disconnection between the siblings: 'the blood tie is not strong' (p. 121). As a consequence, Kent depicts Agnes as an independent but lonely figure who readily 'convinced [her]self that [she] no longer loved' any of her biological family (p. 122). Even her few pleasant memories of peacefulness with her mother and brother become 'cold' (p. 59) and tainted by the knowledge of her subsequent abandonment. Agnes's experience with her foster family exacerbates this sense of loss, particularly after she develops an attachment to Inga, her surrogate mother, who later dies while giving birth to a stillborn baby. The death is tragic, but Agnes is more traumatised by the loss of her only emotional bond to a family figure. Furthermore, her foster father's cruel remark that 'maybe you will die too' (p. 148) encapsulates the brutal callousness of a life without familial love. Thus, Kent examines the powerful consequences of the presence or absence of a loving family, suggesting that this acts as a foundation for one's future relationships.

Ultimately, the only true family Agnes has in the novel is the family she forges while awaiting her sentencing. In the midst of her isolation and impending execution, Agnes gradually opens up to Tóti and the Jónsson family, who in turn treat her with a kindness and acceptance she has never known. Tóti's unconditional love and respect for Agnes as a fellow human to some extent bridges the divide between Agnes and the rest of society, allowing her to share her story with him and feel heard, even though Tóti cannot countermand her death sentence. Furthermore, the end of the novel is dominated by a tone of darkness and dread as Agnes awaits her fate, yet Steina effectively minimises this by 'gather[ing] as many lamps as she could find, lighting them and placing them about the room to dispel the shadows that lingered in the corners' (p. 321–322). This literal illumination represents the metaphorical light and goodness that can be spread by a loving family. Tragically, Agnes only experiences this sense of belonging shortly before her death; Kent's novel shows readers not just the emotional upheaval of familial absence but also the heartbreak that comes with Agnes realising what her life has lacked.

Thus, *Burial Rites* illustrates how neglect and emotional abandonment by one's family can have long-lasting impacts on one's life. This can be seen in Agnes, whose harsh treatment in adulthood compounds the psychological scars of her childhood. Although Agnes's fate is undeniably a tragic one, Kent nonetheless depicts how the kindness of others can have a significant influence on otherwise isolated individuals. Ultimately, the novel emphasises the importance of familial and empathetic connections in healing and rebuilding one's sense of trust and self-worth.

## ***Hamlet* by William Shakespeare**

a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of loyalty in *Hamlet*?

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a play of fickle, complicated and divided loyalties. The world of the text is rife with corruption, creating an atmosphere of tension and mistrust among the characters that Shakespeare uses to reveal how loyalty can be easily manipulated and lead to tragic consequences. Through the characters' actions and relationships, Shakespeare depicts a world where loyalty is constantly tested and ultimately found to be an elusive and dangerous concept.

The character of Hamlet embodies the complexity of loyalty in the play – torn between his duty to avenge his father's murder and his loyalty to his family, king and country. Following the ghostly appearance of Old Hamlet in Act 1, Scene 5, Hamlet is 'bound [...] to revenge' (1.5.11–12) by the ghost's tale and the imperative command to 'revenge his foul and most unnatural murder' (1.5.31). Although Old Hamlet is the first to invoke the word 'murder', thereby casting aspersions on Claudius, the ambiguity of the ghost's character as arguably a figment of Hamlet's imagination implies that perhaps this is merely a pretence for Hamlet to justify his own rage. Hence, audiences may be sceptical about whether the impetus for Hamlet's quest stems from an honourable sense of loyalty to his slain father or just the unresolved discontent of a maladjusted youth. On the surface, Hamlet appears to believe that his actions are a justifiable retribution on his father's behalf; however, his procrastination and lack of commitment belie his confidence. He postpones confronting the morality of murder by using logistical difficulties as an excuse and even curses his birthright 'that ever was I born to set it right' (1.5.211). His procrastination continues into Acts 3 and 4, prompting the ghost to question whether Hamlet's purpose is 'blunted' (3.4.127), implying a lack of well-defined intent. In essence, the pretence of loyalty is an insufficient motivation for Hamlet to justify rash and bloody action, and his wavering devotion to conflicting desires stifles his development.

Hamlet's all-consuming obsession with revenge and his objective to expose Claudius's treachery test his loyalty to those around him, particularly Gertrude and Ophelia who are jeopardised and eventually killed by his pursuit of vengeance. Upon discovering that Gertrude was complicit in Old Hamlet's death, Hamlet's filial loyalty to his mother, and his father's memory, is put to the test as he struggles to reconcile his duty to avenge his father's death with his complicated love for his mother. When he confronts her in Act 3, Scene 4, he does so by subverting her claim that he 'hast thy father much offended,' (3.4.12) countering her line with the epistrophe, 'Mother, you have my father much offended' (3.4.13). Here, Hamlet specifically contrasts his filial loyalty with Gertrude's marital loyalty and 'wicked tongue' (3.4.15), implying deceit and falseness. He later forcefully demands that she 'confess yourself to heaven, repent what's past, avoid what is to come' (3.4.170–171), creating a sense of urgency through imperative language to suggest Gertrude must seek penance for her disloyalty. This could be interpreted as the actions of a son who feels far greater loyalty towards his father than his mother, and yet Hamlet discloses that he will 'speak (daggers) to her, but use none' (3.2.429). His loyalty to his father does not extend to seeking violent retribution against Gertrude, as Hamlet still harbours a sense of duty and protectiveness towards her, ensuring that he would never enact physical violence against his mother. Instead, Gertrude's death is a tragic, unintended consequence of his contradictory desires to avenge his father and not harm his mother. Ultimately, Hamlet's inability to resolve his conflicting loyalties results in tragedy for himself and those around him, underscoring the devastating consequences wrought by loyalty.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses his characters to offer audiences many examples of both insufficient and excessive amounts of loyalty, highlighting how both concepts are dangerous. For instance, Hamlet's loyalty towards Ophelia is quickly cast aside; the strange choice of tense in him professing 'I did love you once' (3.1.125) is soon undercut by the contradictory and cruel declaration, 'I loved you not' (3.1.129). This results in much emotional turbulence for Ophelia, who is herself divided in opposing loyalties towards Hamlet and her family. In particular, she shows great deference to her father Polonius as exemplified by lines such as 'I shall obey, my lord' (1.3.145) which almost characterise her as a servant. Although her gender and social standing render her a pawn amidst the political posturing of her male counterparts, Ophelia's eventual descent into madness can also be partially attributed to her own subordinate sense of duty and desire to 'obey' (1.3.145) the whims of men. Shakespeare has Hamlet critique Gertrude for demonstrating

what Hamlet considers insufficient loyalty towards her spouse, but he also cautions against excessive fealty by showcasing how Ophelia's loyalty compromises her agency and sanity. Hence, the play highlights how loyalty can be used to manipulate and control others, particularly women, and serves as a warning against blind adherence to expectations of loyalty without consideration for one's own will and wellbeing.

Shakespeare's emphasis on the disloyalty that pervades the kingdom and the characters highlights how even the strongest bonds can be compromised under the weight of corruption and moral decay. As the play draws to a close, the audience is left with a sense of the inevitable breakdown of all salient relationships, making the concept of loyalty all the more fragile and fleeting. In this way, Shakespeare invites the audience to view loyalty as a complex and delicate concept that is easily disrupted. By emphasising the destabilising effects of corruption and moral decay, Shakespeare offers a sobering commentary on the human condition and the tenuous nature of loyalty in a world beset by uncertainty and deceit.



## ***Hamlet* by William Shakespeare**

- b) Analyse the factors that lead to Hamlet's demise in the play.

In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the titular character's downfall is undoubtedly brought about by his tendency to procrastinate, delay and prevaricate. Hamlet's moral indecision and reluctance to avenge his father's murder leads to his psychological torment and exacerbates the frustration in his relationships with other characters. However, he is also compelled by a range of contradictory forces and circumstances that contribute to the tragedy of the play and the demise of all major characters, including himself.

The notion of demise in *Hamlet* is intricately woven through the eponymous character's struggle with procrastination and indecision. These attributes are not merely incidental to the plot but serve as the primary catalysts for his tragic downfall. Shakespeare deftly explores the far-reaching consequences and profound psychological effects of Hamlet's inaction, delving into the depths of his tormented mind. Hamlet's self-reflective soliloquy, in which he laments that 'conscience does make cowards' (3.1.91), highlights the crippling impact of his inability to act. This poignant admission unveils the inner turmoil that plagues him, as he becomes trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of doubt and self-destructive rumination. The weight of his inaction contributes to the image of himself as an incapacitated coward, further exacerbating his psychological anguish. As the play progresses, Hamlet finds himself caught between his burning desire for vengeance and his paralysing fear of the violent actions necessary to achieve it. This internal conflict plunges him into a profound state of mental distress and paranoia. The more he hesitates, the deeper he spirals, sinking further into the recesses of his tortured consciousness. This indecision takes a toll on his self-perception, causing him to become increasingly self-critical. In a moment of introspection, he acknowledges his own flaws, declaring, 'I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in' (3.1.134–138). This poignant admission reveals the overwhelming burden of choice that immobilises him. The sheer magnitude of his emotions and impulses, coupled with the realisation that he cannot possibly act upon all of them, leads to a profound paralysis that persists until it is too late. Ultimately, it is the weight of this choice and Hamlet's relentless indecisiveness that seal his tragic fate. His prolonged contemplation and lack of decisive action leave him entangled in a web of missed opportunities and mounting consequences. By the time he musters the resolve to take action, the forces set in motion by his indecision have already wrought irreversible havoc upon his family, friends and the kingdom of Denmark.

Moreover, Shakespeare uses Hamlet's soliloquies to unearth the protagonist's true fears and moral quandaries that are catalysts for his demise. Hamlet frequently ruminates about the prospect of committing suicide but continually delays making a commitment to either life or death for the majority of the play. He remains unable to identify what is 'nobler' (3.1.65); suffering the misfortunes one is dealt, or 'by opposing, end[ing] them' (3.1.68). These philosophical musings represent a detachment from his immediate concerns, as Hamlet worries about the 'nobler' action as opposed to what would satisfy him or improve his own circumstances. This also gives Hamlet the time and distance to consider the many ways in which vengeance is morally questionable, though he never settles on a position. Ultimately, he is unable to overcome his hamartia of procrastinating; Hamlet's, Claudius's and Laertes's plans unfold in one cacophonous climactic scene resulting in senseless death. Hamlet's dialogue in Act 5 is rife with fatalism, but even in the play's final moments, he is still burdened by his desire to delay. It is only when Laertes confirms to him that 'thou art slain' (5.2.344) that Hamlet takes decisive action in stabbing Claudius. Yet even this gesture is accompanied by a diffusion of responsibility as he cries 'venom, to thy work' (5.2.352–353), as though the poison blade is what kills the king, not the person wielding it. Hence, Shakespeare exposes how Hamlet's innate equivocal characteristics make his spiral into insanity inevitable.

In addition to Hamlet's own personal flaws, several external factors contribute to his downfall in the play. The political situation in Denmark is unstable and 'rotten' (1.4.100) beyond repair, meaning Hamlet is forced to navigate complex power dynamics as he attempts to uncover the truth about his father's death and protect himself from harm. The corrupt and manipulative actions of Claudius, the new king, only serve to complicate matters further. His regicide and fratricide destabilise the kingdom, defying the divine right of kings as well as opening the doors to the profound moral sin of slaying one's own kin. In fact, the murders

and suicides from Act 3 onwards can be seen as consequences of proceeding events and Claudius's bloody usurpation. Hamlet's 'rash and bloody' (3.4.33) stabbing of Polonius is a direct result of his paranoia, stoked by the ghost who galvanises Hamlet's grief and weaponises it as a tool for vengeance. The death of Polonius then catalyses Ophelia's descent into madness, which in turn inspires Laertes to avenge his sister's death. Hence, Shakespeare's portrayal of fatally flawed characters in unstable circumstances culminates in the play's bloody and seemingly inevitable conclusion.

Although Hamlet's own indecision and procrastination are undoubtedly key factors in his demise, they are not the only contributing factors. Shakespeare constructs a complex plot in which causal links span across a range of characters and actions. Hamlet is unable to navigate this complexity successfully, in part due to his own flaws, but also due to overwhelming circumstances in a world corrupted by selfishness and vengeance. Ultimately, the play offers a warning to audiences about the dangers of inaction, indecision and unresolved interpersonal conflicts and how they inevitably lead to tragedy.

## *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of class disparity in *Jane Eyre*?

In the classic novel *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë explores the notion of class disparity through the experiences of the eponymous character Jane as she navigates the rigid social hierarchy of late nineteenth century England. The novel presents a complex portrayal of the social and economic divisions that characterised this era, with Brontë highlighting the distinctions between the different social classes and how they affect the characters' experiences, relationships and agency.

The novel's setting in Victorian England, a society preoccupied with class distinctions, amplifies Brontë's examination of social hierarchies. Her protagonist Jane, an orphaned child, faces many challenges in life, primarily due to her social status that places her at a significant disadvantage compared to more privileged characters. Her aunt, Mrs. Reed, makes it clear that Jane's social status is inferior to that of her cousins, as Bessie chides her, 'You ought to be aware, Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poor-house' (p. 8). This conditional existence and emphasis on 'obligations' underscores how those of lower classes were subject to the whims of the wealthy; Jane is so dependent on her aunt's goodwill that she would be relegated to the poorhouse without her benevolent intervention. Contextually, a modern readership's sense of injustice at this arrangement is strengthened when Brontë depicts Mrs. Reed's condescending tone towards Jane, stating that she is 'less than a servant' (p. 7) and 'not worthy of notice' (p. 21). Thus, Brontë explores how Jane's social status limits her opportunities and leaves her both vulnerable to mistreatment and dependent on the goodwill of the upper classes.

Jane's experiences at Lowood school further highlight the disparity between the social classes in the novel, revealing how these injustices manifest in cruelty and hypocrisy. This is epitomised in the character of Brocklehurst who preaches about self-denial, demanding Lowood's pupils be humble and obedient while he and his family live extravagantly. He is portrayed as a figure of ridicule to readers when Brontë depicts him inspecting the students' appearances; he criticises a girl's curly red hair as an 'abundance' that does not 'conform to nature' (p. 54) despite the quiet remark from Miss Temple that the girl's hair curls naturally. Brocklehurst is further satirised when his wife and children are later introduced with artificial and elaborate 'French curl' hairstyles, highlighting his hypocrisy in demanding lower-class girls adhere to dress codes of strict 'shame-facedness and sobriety' while the upper classes are free to live 'splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs' (p. 55). These symbols of upper-class wealth, comfort and indulgence are juxtaposed with Brocklehurst's insistence that the Lowood girls should not be 'accustom[ed] [...] to habits of luxury' (p. 53), implying that there are fundamental differences between classes that should not be overcome or rectified. Through this, Brontë conveys the double standards of those who reify class disparity and deny others any opportunity for class mobility.

Furthermore, Brontë explores how marriage was a tool used to maintain social status and often the only means by which a woman could seek to elevate her standing in Victorian England. When pondering the notion of Rochester marrying Blanche Ingram, Jane laments that she 'could not fathom' the motivations that drive people of 'their class' (p. 164), implying her upbringing excludes her from accurately understanding the minds of others. In reality, readers are shown that Jane is far more intelligent and rational than women like Blanche, yet Jane's inner monologue leads to a self-perpetuating stifling of her desires until she casts off social mores. Her status of governess places her beneath Rochester in the traditional social hierarchy, yet she defies his assumptions that 'because [she is] poor, obscure, plain, and little, [she is] soulless and heartless' (p. 223). Though somewhat self-effacing, this declaration is a bold challenge and demand for respect of her individuality and humanity regardless of her social station. This stands in stark contrast to the behaviour of Blanche who would be a conventionally perfect match for Rochester due to her status and wealth. However, readers are aligned with Jane in recognising that Blanche's beauty and wealth have a hollow superficiality. Blanche is depicted as living in a world of 'purple draperies and polished furniture' in front of a 'genial fire [with] [...] the most pleasant radiance' (p. 102), illuminating the opulence of her lifestyle as the 'beau-ideal of domestic comfort' (p. 82). And yet, Jane remarks, 'her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil' (p. 162) as Blanche merely repeats

phrases from books and is generally haughty and disdainful towards others, establishing her as a foil for Jane's perceptiveness and kind-hearted nature. Through this, Brontë perhaps implies that although society places more value on high social standing, being of a lower class can actually afford a person true value in the form of insight and compassion for others.

Overall, *Jane Eyre*'s portrayal of class disparity reveals the oppressive and restrictive nature of social expectations. The novel suggests that social class is a barrier to genuine relationships, as people are often unable to express their true feelings due to societal pressures and constraints. Furthermore, the novel critiques the way society places more value on superficial appearances and material wealth over genuine substance and character. Through Jane's story, the novel encourages readers to challenge – if not outright defy – societal expectations and stereotypes, and to value individuals based on their true worth and individuality.

**Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë**

b) Jane struggles to be an independent character throughout the novel.

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

In her novel *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë presents her eponymous protagonist with numerous challenges to her independence as she confronts the limitations imposed by Victorian-era gender norms and societal expectations. Despite these challenges, Jane defiantly pursues autonomy and refuses to compromise her sense of self, ultimately achieving both love and freedom without conceding either. Although Jane struggles with forces that oppose her independent spirit throughout the plot, her unwavering self-esteem, self-sufficiency and pursuit of equality in relationships allow her to assert herself and establish her independence.

From the outset of the novel, Jane is forced to contend with characters who attempt to undermine her self-esteem. The Reeds, her guardians at Gateshead, are frustrated by her refusal to conform to their expectations, leading them to issue the imperative, ‘until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent’ (p. 3). Similarly at Lowood Institution, Mr. Brocklehurst denigrates her as ‘an interloper and an alien’ (p. 56) and encourages her peers to shun her. Jane is thus confined to a life of poverty, loneliness and misfortune, deprived of the self-esteem and respect she deserves. However, even when Mr. Rochester proposes to care for her, Jane ‘indomitabl[y]’ proclaims, ‘I care for myself’ (p. 280) and refuses to compromise her independence. Her unwavering sense of self-worth and self-respect serve to distinguish her as a truly independent female character in the historical context of Brontë’s era. Jane’s struggle to assert herself and maintain her self-esteem resonates with modern readers and evokes a sense of admiration for her courage in the face of societal expectations. Thus, Jane’s character underscores the importance of self-acceptance and the preservation of individuality, themes that remain just as relevant and compelling to contemporary audiences.

Furthermore, Brontë conveys how self-esteem can be the catalyst for self-sufficiency, as it drives Jane to uphold her values and ultimately empowers her with financial freedom and self-determination. This is exemplified by Jane’s rejection of St. John’s marriage proposal, instead choosing to prioritise her independence as her ‘own mistress’ (p. 385) and refusing to compromise her values for the sake of security, while actively pursuing a riskier marriage with Rochester. Despite the potential for readers to view Jane’s eventual marriage as a loss of her autonomy, Brontë endorses this decision as the culmination of Jane’s liberation. The novel frames Jane’s unwavering self-esteem and self-respect as the cornerstone of her success and happiness. Jane’s dedication to staying true to her values grants her the financial freedom and self-determination to pursue her dreams and carve out a path for herself, unencumbered by societal expectations and the constraints of the patriarchal system. Hence, the novel emphasises the importance of valuing and respecting oneself in achieving success and happiness. Through her unwavering commitment to her values and refusal to compromise her sense of self, Jane establishes herself as a self-sufficient woman who is capable of choosing a romantic partner without sacrificing her independence or identity.

Moreover, the novel celebrates self-esteem as a necessary foundation for equality in relationships. Despite Jane’s many obstacles, her journey ultimately culminates in establishing herself as an independent character. While her self-esteem and self-sufficiency play a significant role in this journey, it is also important to note that the societal norms of the time make this achievement all the more impressive. During the Victorian era, women were expected to be obedient, passive and reliant on men for their well-being. By refusing to conform to these norms and pursuing her own desires, Jane becomes a trailblazing figure for women in literature. Brontë portrays Jane as a complex and independent woman who seeks a partner who can meet her on equal terms. Unlike Blanche Ingram, who desires ‘undivided homage’ (p. 157) and stereotypical infatuation, Jane wants a partner who can match her genuine passion and intensity. The recurring motif of fire throughout the novel serves as a metaphor for Jane’s fiery personality and the passionate love she shares with Rochester, who similarly possesses ‘flaming and flashing eyes’ (p. 254). Through this, Brontë extols Jane for refusing to settle for a life without agency or passionate intensity. Furthermore, Rochester’s growth as a character and acknowledgment of Jane’s status as an equal emphasises the importance of independence in relationships.

Ultimately, while Jane faces many challenges to her independence throughout the novel, her unwavering commitment to her own values and sense of self ultimately allows her to achieve the autonomy and self-determination she so desires. Brontë's portrayal of Jane as an independent character who refuses to compromise her identity is both a reflection of the societal issues of the time and a call to action for women to assert themselves in the face of oppression. As a result, Jane's journey serves as an inspiration to readers both past and present, reminding us of the importance of self-esteem, self-sufficiency and perseverance in the face of adversity.



## ***Macbeth* by William Shakespeare**

- a) Analyse the significance of Macbeth's ambition in driving the plot of the play.

William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* chronicles the bloody downfall of its protagonist whose hamartia of ambition compels him to obtain and retain the crown at all costs. Macbeth is depicted as a ruthless soldier but insecure politician who struggles to maintain his sanity as well as his grip on power as the play progresses. However, the contributing factors of the witches' prophecies and Lady Macbeth's manipulation in propelling Macbeth's tragic trajectory cannot be ignored, as Shakespeare explores how these circumstances inevitably lead to catastrophic outcomes.

Macbeth's ambition is the catalyst for his pursuit of the kingship, though this is ultimately set in motion by the witches' intervention. When initially confronted by the witches in Act 1 Scene 3, Macbeth's response is to question their predictions as 'to be king stands not within the prospect of belief' (1.3.76–77). However, the witches succeed in sowing the seed in Macbeth's mind, as once Banquo leaves, Macbeth mutters in an aside, 'why do I yield to that suggestion whose horrid image doth unfix my hair, And make my seated heart knock at my ribs' (1.3.147–149). Here, he rhetorically questions why the seemingly 'good' (1.3.147) fortune is engendering such dread in him, suggesting that he is already contemplating the murder of Duncan as a necessity. It is also noteworthy that although both Macbeth and Banquo are given prophecies, the sagacious Banquo exercises far more scepticism – he makes no effort to usurp the throne to install Fleance even though the witches foretold that his offspring would be king. Contextually, this would have aided Shakespeare in satisfying his patron King James I who claimed to be a descendant of Fleance and condemned the notion of supernatural influences, especially witchcraft. Through this, Shakespeare effectively conveys the insidious power of prophecy in corrupting those who are prone to 'yield[ing] to that suggestion' (1.3.147), depicting ambition as a dangerous trait that leaves one vulnerable to manipulation.

The play furthers its examination of manipulative influences in its portrayal of the nuanced relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, arguably the two most ambitious characters in the text. Where the audience's introduction to Macbeth comes in the form of exaltations like 'brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)' (1.2.18) and 'noble Macbeth' (1.2.78), Lady Macbeth is, by contrast, revealed in a domestic setting having never been mentioned by any other characters. This juxtaposition of a well-regarded soldier and his home-bound wife would imply she has little political influence, but Shakespeare quickly dispels this assumption and subverts the contextual gender expectations of his era by establishing Lady Macbeth as a shrewd, Machiavellian plotter desperate for power. She acknowledges that her husband is 'not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it' (1.5.19–20), denoting her lack of faith in his ability to act. Then, in her famous soliloquy, she laments the limitations of her gender and rejects her womanhood as an obstacle to her attaining power, calling upon the gods to 'unsex' (1.5.48) her and 'take [her] milk for gall' (1.5.55). This is reinforced by her later declaration that she would have 'plucked [her] nipple from [a baby's] boneless gums and dashed the brains out' (1.7.65–66) if needed to fulfil a promise to Macbeth and advance their political position. Although hypothetical, her explicit and visceral imagery would have been especially confronting to Elizabethan audiences but remains disquieting to contemporary ones, foreshadowing the brutality she will inspire in Macbeth. Before going through with the murder, Macbeth bemoans the fact that he has 'no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself' (1.7.25–27). However, he is interrupted by the entry of Lady Macbeth who taunts him for his hesitancy, and questions whether he will 'live a coward in [his] own esteem' (1.7.47), thereby undermining her husband's masculinity. However, her influence over him wanes after he commits the sin of regicide. In spite of Lady Macbeth's protestations that 'a little water clears us of this deed' (2.2.86), Macbeth is tormented by his guilt, believing that not even the ocean could 'wash this blood clean from my hand' (2.2.78–79), foreshadowing the psychological toll and indissoluble 'damned spot' (5.1.37) of bloody guilt that destroys them both. Therefore, by depicting the combined ambitious spirits of the Macbeth couple, Shakespeare exposes the inevitability of tragedy.

However, once the events of the play are set in motion, Macbeth is motivated less by greedy ambition for future gains and more by paranoia that he will lose everything he has attained. This fear is evidenced by his preoccupation with securing his position, such as when he orders the murder of his former friend Banquo and attempts to eliminate any perceived threats to his reign. By Act 3, his mind is ‘full of scorpions’ (3.2.41) at the prospect of Banquo and Fleance remaining alive and thus threatening his kingship. Macbeth’s ambition empowers him to view these murders as justifiable to retain the throne, yet his paranoia is what feeds his ‘black and deep desires’ (1.4.58) to commit increasingly heinous and despotic crimes, culminating in the slaughter of Lady Macduff and her child. The doctor in Act 5 ominously notes that ‘unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles’ (5.2.75–76) in his appraisal of Lady Macbeth’s madness, though his remarks could equally apply to Macbeth whose unnatural usurpation and murder results in him ‘almost [forgetting] the taste of fears’ having ‘supped full with horrors [...] [and] slaughterous thoughts’ (5.5.11–16). This depiction of a character having lost all sense of purpose is epitomised in the ‘tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’ soliloquy (5.5.22) wherein Macbeth sees himself as ‘poor player’ who will soon be ‘heard no more’ (5.5.27–29). Through this, Shakespeare intimates that whatever ambitions Macbeth once had have since abandoned him, replaced by a sense of existential futility as he awaits his death.

Ultimately, the play conveys the tragic consequences of unchecked ambition; it depicts Macbeth being manipulated by external forces to take the kingship, only to be consumed by the resulting guilt and paranoia that come from achieving his goal. In this sense, *Macbeth* is a cautionary tale about the dangers of blindly pursuing selfish aspirations without heeding one’s conscience or considering the negative ramifications of one’s actions.



## ***Macbeth* by William Shakespeare**

b) How does the play explore what it takes to be king?

Written during England's Jacobean era in the early 1600s, William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* contains many implicit and explicit messages about what it takes to be king. The play revolves around political notions of usurpation and the divine right of kingship, and Shakespeare also examines the psyche of the various kings in *Macbeth* to explore suitable characteristics for a ruler. Shakespeare offers audiences a clear why Duncan and Macbeth are ineffective rulers, and ultimately celebrates Malcolm as a symbol of the restoration of order.

King Duncan displays many traits that were historically associated with noble kings, but Shakespeare subtly implies that he lacked an awareness of the dangers of others, leaving him vulnerable to Macbeth's betrayal. In his introductory scene, Duncan is presiding over battle reports from his Thanes and a captain, seemingly in control and regal in his use of courtly iambic pentameter. However, these reports pertain to an attempted rebellion by the previous Thane of Cawdor who has been defeated, implying that the realm is already unstable under Duncan. He then bestows the title of Thane of Cawdor upon Macbeth to reward his bravery in battle – 'what he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won' (1.2.78) – a gesture that aligns with the witches' prophecy and sparks Macbeth's desire to pursue the throne. The fact that Duncan names two successive Thanes of Cawdor who end up betraying points to his poor judgement, though audiences are still compelled to pity him and his bloody fate. Long after his murder, Lady Macbeth's rhetorical question 'who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' (5.1.41–42) serves not just as a lament for Duncan's grisly demise, but also as a suggestion that Duncan had an excess of blood. This aligns with the philosophy of bodily humours that was widely accepted in Shakespeare's time; the humour of blood was associated with sanguine optimism, displayed by Duncan when he exclaims 'great happiness!' in response to Macbeth's military victory (1.2.67). However, the contextual understanding dictated that the humours must be in balance, not in excess. Thus, although Duncan's death is portrayed as a brutal violation of the divine right of kings, Shakespeare nevertheless critiques Duncan and implies he was ill-suited for the age of realpolitik ushered in by Macbeth.

Conversely, Macbeth is undoubtedly far more guilty in his excess of black bile humour, associated with melancholic rumination that stands in the way of his kingship. He is a highly introspective character who interrogates his emotional response to the witches' prophecy, wondering why he 'yield[s] to that suggestion, despite it making his 'heart knock at [his] ribs' (1.3.147–149). The mere thought of regicide results in spiralling thoughts and imagery of heart palpitations, implying that Macbeth is far too erratic and unstable to be an effective king. Were it not for the influence of his aggressively ambitious wife, Macbeth would almost certainly not have gone through with Duncan's murder. This is seen in his attempt to renege on their plan, 'we will proceed no further in this business' (1.7.34), only to be convinced otherwise by Lady Macbeth's manipulations. He returns from the deed in a frenzied state, encapsulated by the broken iambic pentameter and overlapping dialogue that only worsens as the play progresses. Furthermore, Macbeth fixates on the witches' prophecies and the injustice of having been given 'a fruitless crown' (3.1.66), since unlike Banquo he will not beget kings, nor does he have an heir to provide continuity for the realm. This detail was particularly salient for Shakespeare's audience who were still reeling from the death of the long-reigning and much-loved Queen Elizabeth I who also had no heirs. Thus, by depicting a despotic ruler who is undone by his faith in the witches, Shakespeare substantiated his patron King James I's aversion to the supernatural, suggesting that belief in such forces is incompatible with stable kingship.

The play presents Malcolm as the only character deserving of kingship, and with his crowning, Shakespeare restores hope for the realm. Although Malcolm has relatively few speaking lines, he has a powerful presence as the rightful heir with the makings of a righteous king. Audiences first meet Malcolm in Act 2, Scene 3 when he and his brother Donalbain learn of their father's murder. While Macbeth pretends to grieve, the brothers quietly escape, recognising that 'to show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy' (2.3.161–162). Here, Malcolm displays a healthy suspicion of the Thanes, which sets him apart from his blindly trusting father and suggests that Malcolm has learned from Duncan's error. Shakespeare's portrayal of Malcolm's wisdom is intensified in Act 4, Scene 3 when Malcolm cleverly tests Macduff's loyalty. When Macduff proclaims his loyalty to Malcolm, Malcolm protests that he is a violent, lustful,

avaricious tyrant who would be even worse for the realm than Macbeth, then asks Macduff if he still thinks he is 'fit to govern' (4.3.118). The distraught Macduff abandons his hope only for Malcolm to reveal he was testing Macduff – this deceit was his 'first false speaking', and he is in reality a devoted, humble man who 'is thine and my poor country's to command' (4.3.149–151). With this gesture, Malcolm conveys his capacity to be deceptive for good reasons and his desire to have Thanes that support him because they value a worthy king, not because they are seeking to advance their own position. Thus, when Malcolm has been crowned king at the end of the play, audiences have faith that he is the antithesis of the 'dead butcher' Macbeth (5.8.82), and possesses kingly virtues.

Ultimately, the play endorses this model of wise and prudent leadership as essential characteristics for good kingship. Through Duncan and Macbeth, Shakespeare explores the dangerous potential of an unworthy king, and through Malcolm, he embodies the hope and optimism of a rightful ruler. To this end, Shakespeare's juxtaposition of a tyrannical and an honourable monarch offers audiences a clear vision of the necessary traits of a good king.

### ***Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro**

a) What perspective on humanity is communicated in the novel?

In Kazuo Ishiguro's science fiction novel *Never Let Me Go*, the main characters struggle with questions of identity and humanity due to their unique existence as clones. Their lack of comprehension or connection to their origins or possible destabilises their sense of self, which prompts them to question the extent to which they are human. This is exacerbated by societal pressures and the institutional oppression that seeks to define clones by their sole purpose as organ donors. Thus, Ishiguro explores the interrelationship between humanity and identity through characters that display undeniably human emotions and flaws.

Though the novel does not offer readers a clear answer to the eternal question of what it means to be human, it does suggest that the ability to create art and appreciate aesthetic beauty is an intrinsically human instinct. One instance of this idea is exemplified by Miss Emily who discloses the truth about the deferral being nothing more than a 'dream' (p. 256). However, she endeavors to console Tommy and Kathy by revealing her collection of the clones' artwork, intending to present it as evidence of their humanity to influential people. In her impassioned plea, Miss Emily proposes that they could proudly, rhetorically proclaim, 'Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?' (p. 256). Her reference to them not just as human but specifically children demonstrates her deep empathy for their plight, and her desperation for others to acknowledge their humanity. However, Miss Emily is also acutely aware of the prevailing concerns among the general public, who prioritise the well-being of their own children and the use of clones for medical purposes. She explains that the public 'did their best not to think about you [...] you were less than human, so it didn't matter' (p. 258). Thus, Ishiguro juxtaposes the compassion of Miss Emily who appreciates the clones' humanity against the callousness of others who find it more convenient to ignore such evidence. This compels readers to grapple with the ethical implications arising from the disregard of the clones' humanity and the significance of their artistic expression in favor of myopic self-preservation.

Ishiguro also explores the human impulse to understand one's past and future, depicting the clones as irrepressibly curious. This is especially true of Ruth, who aggressively pursues the truth behind her existence and seeks out the possible from which she was cloned. This pursuit ultimately leads to a sense of disillusionment – she laments that the clones were most likely 'modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps' (p. 164). The brutality of this revelation, reflected in her sharp asyndeton, prompts Ruth to question her inherent value, knowing that clones are duplicates of people already disregarded by polite society. Although Kathy initially rejects Ruth's view, she too is troubled by the treatment they experience. When she internalises the feeling of seeing herself from the perspective of unsympathetic humans, she reflects, 'it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange' (p. 36). Through these reflections, Ishiguro examines the darker side of humanity, that is, criticising people's inclination to dehumanise others in order to rationalise their poor treatment or exploitation. However, he also offers readers a more optimistic perspective: the innately human desire of the clones to reflect upon their perception as they attempt to forge their identities and connections to others.

Moreover, Ishiguro highlights the importance and power of human relationships in defining the human condition. The strong bond between Kathy and Tommy becomes more critical as their donations near, with Kathy describing their relationship as the only thing stopping them from being 'swept away into the night' (p. 269). Despite their predetermined fate, the characters in the novel display a range of human emotions, including love, jealousy and fear. In particular, their discovery of their own mortality and impermanence prompts them to exercise their limited agency in developing intimate relationships with one another to reinforce their sense of humanity. These relationships, especially the love triangle between Ruth, Tommy and Kathy, are far from perfect and in fact showcase some of the characters' worst impulses, including Ruth's desire to control others, Tommy's sense of inferiority and Kathy's passivity. However, each of these behaviours is indicative of their complex inner worlds. Ishiguro demonstrates that they possess both admirable and shameful traits, thereby compelling readers to engage with them as complex human characters.

Ultimately, Ishiguro's novel examines universal truths about the human condition through the lens of his characters' unique circumstances. The struggle with identity, the importance of human relationships, and the impermanence of existence are issues that affect all self-aware beings, and hence Ishiguro invites readers to fully empathise with the clones and their humanity. To this end, Ishiguro expertly reminds readers of the human instinct to seek answers to existential questions, challenging and furthering their understanding of what it means to be human.

## ***Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro**

- b) Analyse the significance of memory in shaping the development of Kathy in *Never Let Me Go*.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* explores the concept of memory in a complex and thought-provoking manner, unearthing the characters' memories to reveal the inner workings of their world and to show how memories shape their identities and ultimately their fates. The protagonist Kathy is deeply nostalgic, particularly when forced to grapple with the impending loss of her fellow clones, she clings to her childhood memories and fleeting moments of happiness as a source of solace. Kathy's memories provide her with purpose and hope but her fixation with the past ultimately limits her development in the present.

One of the central messages of the novel is that memory is not just about what we remember but also about what we forget. The clones' memories are selectively manipulated to suppress certain truths and reinforce their role in society, but this only serves to heighten their feelings of confusion and disorientation, as Kathy's opening recollections are undermined by her wistful remark that 'maybe I'm remembering it wrong' (p. 8). The character of Kathy represents the dangers of nostalgia and the negative consequences of living in the past. Her fixation on memories of Hailsham and her childhood experiences limit her ability to move forward and make decisions in the present. This is reflected in her passivity and lack of agency, which are products of her psychological conditioning. For instance, when Ruth slyly undermines Kathy and Tommy's relationship by stating she and Kathy have been ridiculing Tommy behind his back, Kathy is unable to refute this or repair this fracture, simply stating, '[s]omething in me just gave up' (p. 193). This distancing language and Kathy's ruminating narration prevent her from developing strong and healthy relationships as she is far more inclined to dwell in her pleasant memories than confront the complex problems in her present or her fear of the future. By selectively focusing on her past, Kathy perpetuates the cycle of disorientation and confusion that characterises the clones' experiences.

Kathy's nostalgia is also characterised by unrealistic optimism as Ishiguro reveals how she tends to view people and past events through rose-tinted glasses. This perspective encourages passivity and a belief that lost things can be found again. For instance, she sees Norfolk as a place where lost things are rediscovered and finds comfort in the idea that what she has lost may one day be found there. Even though she has 'tried to leave Hailsham behind [...] there came a point when [she] just stopped resisting' (p. 4–5) and gave in to the allure of nostalgia. This penchant for reminiscing contributes to her overall passivity and lack of agency; her fixation on the past hinders her ability to exercise her free will, as demonstrated by her ongoing attachment to Hailsham and its memories. She wonders whether one day she will 'pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance [...] and I'll think: "Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually *is* Hailsham!"' (p. 6). Despite its closure, she continues to see reminders of Hailsham in her surroundings, and her tone of breathless excitement underscores her desperate hope, but also her naive optimism, ultimately obscuring her ability to make sound judgments in the present.

Finally, Ishiguro also examines how the salience of certain memories impact Kathy's sense of self. In the novel's conclusion, Kathy proclaims that 'the memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading', consoling herself with the knowledge that even though Ruth and Tommy have completed, she will never 'lose [her] memories of them' (p. 280). The theme of memory is thus closely tied to the idea of loss, as Kathy discovers she and her fellow clones are fated to have short lifespans, meaning they are acutely aware of the inevitability of their completion. However, in the face of such existential dread, Kathy experiences the power of shared memory as a force that can bind individuals together. This is exemplified by her relationship with Ruth; Kathy reflects that their frequent clashes and eventual estrangement are 'not nearly as important as all the other things: like the fact that we'd grown up together at Hailsham, the fact that we knew and remembered things no one else did' (p. 4). However, Ishiguro also illustrates the naivety of relying too heavily on shared memory to maintain relationships. The metaphor of 'powerful tides tugging [them] apart' (p. 194) underscores the fragility of human connections based solely on past memories. Ultimately, while a shared past can establish strong bonds between people, it is not an unbreakable force, and Ishiguro suggests individuals must recognise the limitations of nostalgia in maintaining relationships.

Thus, in *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro explores the complex and multifaceted nature of memory through the experiences of his characters. The novel suggests that while memories can empower individuals, they can also encourage passivity and limit one's ability to make decisions in the present. Furthermore, through the character of Kathy, Ishiguro demonstrates the dangers of nostalgia and the negative consequences of fixating on the past. However, the novel ultimately highlights a more optimistic aspect of memory: the importance of shared memories and the bonds they create, which can have a profound impact on individuals throughout their lives.



## ***The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan**

- a) Analyse the impact of William's imagination on his development in the novel.

Andrew McGahan's novel *The White Earth* is a complex portrait of the protagonist William, a deeply imaginative and sensitive child, as he experiences severe trauma at the hands of selfish adult influences. His child-like sense of wonder and exploration become a means of escaping the brutal reality of his circumstances as a pawn in his mother and uncle's power play, though ultimately his imagination is insufficient protection from the dangers that surround him.

William's imagination plays an important role in shaping his understanding of his identity and value to others. Initially, his mind enables him to see imaginative opportunities all around him; for instance, William's father stores a pile of lumber in their yard to one day build a new house, but in William's eyes this is 'stacked up in a big square like a castle' (p. 8). This simile and the connotations of a castle as a source of fantasy and wonder establish William's creativity and sense of opportunity. However, following his father's tragic death, his mother denies him such indulgences and quickly positions him as an heir to John McIvor's Kuran property, treating her son as a vehicle for achieving financial stability. Unfortunately for her, William is far more interested in exploration and play, possibly as a means of escapism from the trauma of losing a parent and being physically and emotionally abused by his mother, but also possibly because he is merely eight years old and does not comprehend the machinations of adult greed. This interpretation of William as naïve is strengthened by the depiction of him in the novel's opening – when confronted with the cloud of smoke rising from a malfunctioning harvester that killed his father, 'he stared at it, wondering' (p. 1). This harrowing experience is a source of 'wonder' for a curious child, though in the absence of any peers his own age, his child-like behaviours only lead to a sense of isolation and alienation as he struggles to navigate life on Kuran Station.

However, William's imagination also leads to misconceptions about the world, in particular the cultural and social realities of rural Queensland. McGahan uses William as an intergenerational foil for John to contrast the innocence of William's perspective with John's harmful prejudice. When he first discovers the hat of a former member of the Queensland Native Mounted Police, he is alight with excitement at such an 'official and important' hat that made him feel like 'he was a commander of... well, of something' (p. 155). This sense of vague, imaginative possibilities underscores William's naivety as 'with the hat on his head, and the gun in his hand, he felt a power working in him' (p. 155). Later, when Ruth learns these items belonged to her grandfather who was responsible for 'dispersing' (p. 335) First Nation tribes – a euphemism for racially motivated murder – William is dizzy with confusion, desperately trying to reconcile 'the things he had seen and heard, the messages, the warnings, the hat' (p. 337). This depiction of such a confronting historical truth contributes to William's gradual disillusionment with adults as he is forced to comprehend the savagery of colonial genocide despite his young age and nascent understanding of the world.

Furthermore, William's imaginative nature also fuels his desire for escapism from the harsh realities of his family's history as well as his own present. His fascination with the story of the Bunyip, a creature from First Nations stories, leads him to imagine the creature as a protector and friend, allowing him to feel a sense of belonging in the unfamiliar and often hostile environment of his uncle's property. As William's family drama unfolds and tensions rise, he retreats further into his own mind, creating vivid, imaginary worlds to escape the harshness of his reality. However, this also leads to a disconnect from the world around him; his imagination proves to be a double-edged sword. McGahan uses William's journey to explore the role of imagination in shaping a child's perspective of the world, as well as the consequences of an overactive imagination when it comes to understanding complex historical and social realities. Although William's imagination cannot protect him from these harsh realities, it does aid him in discovering more about the world, culminating in his three-day walkabout. On this journey, he hallucinates meeting ghosts that lead him to a mass grave containing the bones of slaughtered First Nations people. His reverence for 'their place' (p. 353) underscores how his proclivity for stories and legends has given him empathy for the stories and legends of others, even First Nations people from past generations whom he has never met. Moreover, William's imagination serves as a means of reconciling the disparate parts of his identity; a boy who is both a member of the white Australian colonial community and an inheritor of the unceded land

of First Nations people. Through his journey, he gains a deeper appreciation for the complex and often violent history of his home, a history that he initially knew little about. William's transformation from a boy who rhetorically questions how his uncle could 'be proud of a square mile of dirt' (p. 82) to one with a deep respect and understanding for the significance of land, affirms McGahan's endorsement of the power of imagination to engender empathy and understanding. Thus, McGahan shows that imagination can be a powerful tool for building bridges between different cultures, as well as forging a sense of one's own identity. Ultimately, McGahan portrays the power of imagination as an essential aspect of childhood, as it allows William to gradually explore and come to terms with the world around him. In this sense, the novel captures the impact of one's inner landscape on identity and belonging, providing a nuanced insight into the complexities of the adult world through the invaluable perspective of childhood imagination.



***The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan**

b) How is the reader invited to view the concept of entitlement in *The White Earth*?

Andrew McGahan's novel *The White Earth* foregrounds the concept of entitlement and explores land ownership as an analogy for personal independence and prosperity. McGahan cautions against pursuing independence at the cost of compassion for others, highlighting how an entitled sense of privilege can manifest as a dangerous and self-destructive pursuit.

One of the clearest examples of entitlement in the text is John McIvor's sense of entitlement over Kuran Station. This feeling is so deeply ingrained in John that his bitterness festers and corrodes his ability to care for others, instead he obstinately insists on 'show[ing] everyone how badly the world has treated him' (p. 261). McGahan implies that John's perception of his independence being infringed upon is the source of much personal turmoil, contributing to his 'loath[ing of] his own helplessness and poverty' (p. 74). Even when he rectifies this perceived slight by acquiring Kuran Station, he is unable to break free from this self-centred mindset and sense of deprivation. This contrasts with John's remarks to William about the importance of 'knowing where you belong and taking responsibility for that place' (p. 109), thereby highlighting the hypocrisy of his worldview. Thus, while John's journey to reclaim Kuran Station is a testament to his determination and independent streak, McGahan encourages readers to understand how such pursuits can blind a person to the consequences of their actions.

The novel also suggests that the desire for independence can lead to toxic entitlement, blinding individuals to the needs and experiences of others. John's sense of entitlement and his rejection of authority and tradition are what ultimately lead to his downfall, highlighting the dangerous consequences of pursuing independence without considering the wider implications of one's actions. The novel also critiques the notion that independence is an innate right, as John's entitlement to Kuran Station is based on a belief in his superiority over others, including the First Nations people who originally owned the land. Even when celebrating his values, John's independence is inextricably linked to his rejection of establishment and grievances, epitomised by the Australian Independence League charter, which begins by listing everything they reject: 'government interference [...] excessive immigration and the dilution of traditional Australian culture' (p. 133). The fact that even nine-year-old William quickly discerns the flaws and prejudices innate in this brand of aggressive independence enables McGahan to critique its foundations, as the novel ultimately exposes John's entitled worldview for its racist myopia. Hence, McGahan encourages readers to critically examine the rationale for a sense of entitlement and to instead see the value in a more inclusive, compassionate approach.

Ultimately, the novel champions William's rejection of entitlement and his child-like but admirable sense of justice. Early in the novel, John's glorification of 'independence' (p. 127) and 'mak[ing] your own decisions' elicits 'dutiful' (p. 137) nods from William, whose mind is still highly malleable. However, his journey in appreciating the spiritual significance of the land enables him to be open-minded to other perspectives such as Ruth's. When John later 'claim[s] Native Title' because 'there's only me left. I've been here all along,' Will feels a telling 'chill,' alongside readers, as even he knows 'something crucial was being warped here, bent into a shape it wasn't meant to be' (p. 294). By contrast, John is utterly unwilling to consider things from alternate points of view, staunchly adhering to his entitled belief that he is the most innocent and victimised party. Even when confronted with Ruth's proof, John adopts a 'venomous' (p. 347) expression and insists that the genocidal actions of his ancestors were justified. Despite John's attempts to shape William in his own image, his poisonous views fail to influence William's capacity for independent thought. In fact, William's experiences allow him to observe the fallibility of the adults around him and form his own opinions. His ability to think for himself allows him to understand the importance of land to First Nations people and see things from their perspective. This shows how independence can facilitate empathy and allow one to appreciate viewpoints that are different from their own. Hence, the novel underscores the importance of being able to think critically and independently in order to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others.

To this end, McGahan juxtaposes William's spiritual journey with the mercenary, entitled attitudes of John as a critique of colonial attitudes towards ownership. The novel thereby warns against the seductive power of selfish beliefs and validates those who have the strength to fight against the sense of entitlement of others.

## ***The Yield* by Tara June Winch**

a) What perspective on the significance of language is communicated in *The Yield*?

Tara June Winch's *The Yield* is a powerful exploration of the complexities of Wiradjuri language and identity that showcases the impact of colonialism while also celebrating the rich culture of First Nations people. Winch seamlessly weaves Wiradjuri words and phrases throughout the novel to convey the inextricable connection between language and culture. She also explains the beauty and meaning of the Wiradjuri language, inviting readers to relish in the power of words in representing the variety of life.

Throughout the novel, Winch intimates that language is a tool for reclaiming and expressing a sense of First Nations cultural identity. The protagonist, August Gondiwindi, is a young Wiradjuri woman who returns to her ancestral homeland after spending much of her life disconnected from her culture and language. As August reconnects with her family and the land, she begins to rediscover her language and her sense of self. Through August's character development, Winch emphasises the importance of language as a means of cultural preservation and personal healing. August's journey to learn her language and '[a]ll the words [Poppy] found on the wind' (p. 3) is mirrored by the inclusion of Wiradjuri words and phrases throughout the novel, which serve to both educate non-Indigenous readers and to celebrate Wiradjuri language and culture. Initially, these are often presented as unique contrasts to the English language; for example, the word for a yellow-tailed black cockatoo, *bilirr*, 'is rolled at the end, the most musical part of any word is the 'rr' – I can't think of any words in Australia like that' (p. 23). Though this positions the Wiradjuri language as something unfamiliar, the dictionary entries throughout the book gradually bridge this gap by exploring cultural commonalities. This is seen in the word for plover birds, *didadida*, which Poppy describes as the word they would scream while fleeing the birds, as '[m]ost people would agree the plover is the worst bird [...] Every Australian would know that' (p. 126). The use of Wiradjuri language here not only adds depth and nuance to the story but also serves as a reminder of the richness of human experiences that can be conveyed through language.

Moreover, the novel features a unique narrative structure in which August's story is interspersed with sections narrated by her grandfather Poppy, who shares the history and stories of his people in Wiradjuri language. This use of language highlights the power and beauty of First Nations storytelling and reinforces the idea that language is not just a means of communication, but a crucial aspect of cultural identity and survival. From the opening lines, Poppy elucidates that language encodes deep emotions when he explains, 'I was born on *Ngurambang* – can you hear it? – *Ngu-ram-bang*. If you say it right it hits the back of your mouth and you should taste blood in your words' (p. 1). This visceral, guttural imagery hints at the inextricable relationship between language and the life and bodies of First Nations people. As the novel progresses, Winch reveals how understanding this profound significance of language requires a commitment to cultural respect. For instance, in one of Reverend Ferdinand Greenleaf's letters, he describes how he explained the concept of God and then pointed at the sky: '[a]t first, [he] thought *Baymee* was their word for God' (p. 152) as he tried to establish a one-for-one correlation between non-Indigenous concepts and First Nations ones. However, as the Gondiwindi people correct his misunderstanding by pointing at Kengal Rock, a Dreaming place, instead of up at the heavens, he accepts that he must be 'flexible with words. That I should be open to translation, as it were' (p. 152). His willingness to revise his understanding and respect these cultural differences later enables August to discover and document the word *Biyaami*, 'spirit that ruled the Gondiwindi' (p. 253) and who lived with Mother Earth on Kengal Rock. Thus, through the interpolation of perspectives in *The Yield*, Winch highlights the importance of cultural respect and understanding in language use, demonstrating that language is not just a means of communication, but a vehicle for cultural identity, history and storytelling.

Another way that language functions in the novel is as a means of resistance against the dominant culture. In many instances, Wiradjuri words are used to challenge and subvert the colonial power structures that have historically marginalised and oppressed First Nations people. One example of this is August's dictionary entries, which become increasingly personal, emotive and entwined with her own experiences; for instance, her description of the word *garrandarang*, meaning book or paper, begins with '[m]y daughter Nicki is going to look after this dictionary, she'll take the *garrandarang* [...] do something good with it' (p. 255).

This facilitates readers' understanding of the language in context, as Winch suggests that these words are inseparable from the meaning they hold for their speakers. Furthermore, the novel also explores the impact of language loss on individuals and communities. Through the character of Poppy, Winch depicts the generational trauma caused by forced removal from land and culture, which results in the loss of language and cultural knowledge. The inclusion of Poppy's and August's documentation of Wiradjuri words serves as a reminder of what could have been lost, as well as a call to action for the preservation and revitalisation of First Nations languages in hopes that they could be 'recognised as a resurrected language, brought back from extinction' (p. 307). Thus, Winch underscores the transformative power of language in reclaiming cultural identity, challenging oppressive power structures, and fostering intergenerational healing and resilience.

Overall, *The Yield* suggests that language is a powerful tool for affirming First Nations culture and identity, challenging dominant power structures, and resisting the legacy of colonialism. Through her use of Wiradjuri words and phrases, Winch creates a rich and immersive reading experience that is both educational and emotionally resonant. To this end, the language in *The Yield* is not only a reflection of Wiradjuri culture and history but also a means of preserving and celebrating it for future generations.

## ***The Yield* by Tara June Winch**

- b) Analyse the importance of a connection to country for the characters in the novel.

In her highly acclaimed 2019 novel *The Yield*, Wiradjuri author Tara June Winch explores the idea of connection to country, which is central to the identity and survival of First Nations people. Through the eyes of protagonist August Gondiwindi, the novel illuminates the ways in which connection to country can provide a sense of belonging, identity and purpose. At the same time, it highlights how disconnection from the land can lead to loss and dispossession as Winch reveals the devastating impact of colonialism and contemporary repossessions of country for First Nations people.

Throughout the novel, Winch explores the connection to country through August's experiences of returning to her homeland and reconnecting with her family and cultural heritage. A primary means by which August renews this sense of connection is by learning and documenting the Wiradjuri language, and thereby honouring storytelling traditions that foreground land and country. Many of the definitions included in Poppy's dictionary describe flora and fauna around Massacre Plains, though there are also more complex phrases such as *dhaganhu ngurambang* or '[w]here is your country' (p. 33–34). This is further elucidated as not being about 'a place on the map' but rather a question that is 'asking something deeper. *Who is your family? [...] Are we related?*' (p. 33–34). This signifies that for the Gondiwindi – and First Nations people more broadly – the notion of country extends far beyond the non-Indigenous definition of a physical place with political boundaries, instead incorporating notions of identity, heritage and connection to others. Through such explanations, readers are able to glimpse the richness and complexity of Wiradjuri culture and the deep connection between people, language and country. Thus, Winch reinforces the idea that language is not just a means of communication, but a crucial aspect of cultural identity and preservation of country.

Moreover, August's own experiences of reconnecting with her language and culture demonstrate the transformative power of connection to country. Upon returning to Prosperous, August learns more about her family and the land, gradually discovering a sense of belonging and purpose that she had never experienced before. While she was apart from her family and home, she had an irrepressible feeling 'that nothing was ever properly said, that she'd existed in a foreign land of herself' (p. 29), which connotes a sense of internal dispossession resulting from a disconnection with country. Over the course of the novel, her involvement in defending their land from a prospective tin mine development further solidifies her connection to country and her resolve to protect it as 'the custodians of this land' (p. 296) in the face of the company's representatives insisting that it is 'government property' (p. 297). The compelling, deeply felt connection to country held by the Gondiwindi family is harshly juxtaposed with the mercenary approach to physical land ownership demonstrated by non-Indigenous characters, ultimately encouraging readers to appreciate the idea of country as a living entity with a rich cultural and spiritual significance.

The novel also highlights the destructive impact of colonialism on the connection to country. Throughout the text, August and her family grapple with the historical legacy that has left them feeling disconnected and displaced. She reflects on the trauma that her ancestors experienced, including dispossession, forced removals and cultural genocide: 'pain travels through our family tree like a songline' (p. 312). The fact that her means of conveying her grief involves the simile of a songline – a uniquely First Nations concept that describes a route across the landscape distilled into a narrative song – suggests to readers that rediscovering a connection to country has empowered August to articulate the realities of her past and present. In spite of the lasting challenges of colonialism, August and her family are resilient and determined to reclaim their connection to country. The novel emphasises the importance of community and solidarity in this process, as August's journey is supported by other members of the Gondiwindi family. For example, August's aunts teach her about traditional foods and medicines, and her understanding is gradually amplified by her acquisition of Wiradjuri words to describe certain ingredients and processes. These moments of sharing cultural practices highlight the importance of intergenerational knowledge and community support in maintaining cultural traditions and connection to country.

In essence, *The Yield* is a powerful exploration of connection to country in First Nations cultures. Through her use of language, storytelling and character development, Winch highlights the centrality of land and heritage for Wiradjuri people. At the same time, the novel also exposes the devastating impact of colonialism on these connections, and the ongoing struggle to reclaim and restore them. Through August's journey of rediscovery and reconnection, readers are invited to reflect on the importance of connection to country and to support First Nations peoples in their efforts to reclaim their land, culture and language.



### ***We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler**

- a) How is the reader invited to view the concept of childhood in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*?

In her bildungsroman *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Karen Joy Fowler explores the concept of childhood and the emotional trauma resulting from the breakdown of a family unit. Through charting the journeys of Rosemary, Lowell and even Fern, Fowler shows how memories play a significant role in shaping one's identity, and how unresolved childhood issues can haunt an individual's psyche. The novel suggests that one's childhood is inextricably linked with one's sense of self, and that examining childhood with a more mature, nuanced understanding in adulthood is vital to understanding one's past and present.

Rosemary, the protagonist of the novel, repeatedly demonstrates that she is haunted by unresolved issues from her childhood. Fowler uses a unique structure to subvert normal narrative chronology and establish Rosemary as a seemingly 'ordinary' (p. 5) college student before going on to reveal the startling abnormalities of her early life. Fowler also encourages readers to view Rosemary as an unreliable narrator, as she acknowledges that '[l]anguage does this to our memories – simplifies, solidifies, codifies, mummifies' and likens telling stories about the past to a photo in a family album that 'replaces the moment it was meant to capture' (p. 48). Furthermore, the non-linear structure of the novel enables Fowler to have Rosemary comment on events from her childhood with the benefit of hindsight and a greater awareness of her circumstances. For instance, she remarks that 'Mom, Dad, and Lowell were more shattered by Fern's departure than I was. I fared better simply by virtue of being too young to quite take it in' (p. 107). Through switching between past and present tense while recounting this memory, Fowler presents us with a character who is deeply affected by her past but is also constantly revisiting, reliving and re-examining her childhood memories to give her life meaning in the present.

Rosemary's unconventional upbringing also has a substantial impact on her conception of self. Many of her memories of playing with Fern initially seem innocuous or joyful until the reality of her father's scientific study encroaches on her recollections. Fowler's portrayal of Rosemary's father as detached and clinical emphasises his inability to relate to his own children beyond a cognitive psychological framework. This, Rosemary later realises, manifests itself in his treatment of his human daughter as a test subject first and foremost: he was 'far less likely to anthropomorphize Fern than to animalize me' (p. 92). In contrast, Fowler implicitly endorses Rosemary's closeness with her 'mirror' (p. 308) Fern as a core part of her childhood development and empathy, while simultaneously criticising her father's inability to connect with his own family on an emotional level. This neglect also greatly impacts Lowell, who struggles with a sense of betrayal upon realising that his parents' love for their children was not unconditional, as evidenced by their decision to give up Fern. He then channels this fury into his animal rights activism though, due to his unresolved trauma, he also develops a self-destructive and malicious streak that sees him 'stropping his [childhood] stories into knives' (p. 58) to emotionally harm his family as retaliation for his own anguish. Thus, Fowler explores the complex ways in which upbringing and neglect can alter a person's ability to empathise with both people and animals.

Rosemary's childhood recollections are also tinged with the sadness of knowing what happens Lowell and Fern – by the end of the novel, Rosemary is the only one 'not currently in a cage' (p. 304). The loss of her simian twin Fern leaves Rosemary adrift, and she is tormented by having to remind herself of this loss. Her relationship with her parents is also irrevocably changed by the decision to give Fern up, and their lack of adequate explanation for this decision haunts Rosemary well into adulthood. However, the novel posits that our understanding of memories shapes their significance, and it is only through introspection that Rosemary can forge a distinct identity. Upon learning from Lowell that she was responsible for Fern's departure, Rosemary is surprised to find no recollection of the event. Nevertheless, she consciously rejects the temptation to feel remorseful and questions, 'what kind of a family lets a five-year-old child decide such things?' (p. 224). This illustrates Rosemary's emotional maturity and ability to contextualise her past experiences, enabling her to scrutinise her childhood and the actions and attitudes of those around her with greater precision. Rather than internalising trauma and directing her focus inward, Fowler suggests that Rosemary is now better equipped to analyse her childhood memories constructively as an adult.

Fundamentally, Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* explicates how profoundly childhood experiences shape our lives. The way Rosemary remembers her childhood plays a significant role in shaping her identity, revealing how unresolved issues from the past can haunt an individual's psyche. Hence, the novel highlights the crucial connection between childhood and self-determination, emphasising the importance of examining and re-examining one's experiences in childhood to gain a clear understanding of oneself.



## ***We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler**

- b) Analyse the significance of Rosemary's parents in shaping her development.

Karen Joy Fowler's 2013 novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* offers a complex portrayal of family and dependency through the depiction of Rosemary and her parents. The novel explores the tensions and tragedies that shape the protagonist Rosemary's life, particularly her unconventional childhood experiences and the loss of Fern from their unorthodox nuclear family. Fowler's non-linear narrative and Rosemary's retrospective narration allow for an in-depth examination of the long-term effects of these experiences. Rosemary's parents both play a profound role in shaping her identity in both deliberate and unintended ways.

Rosemary's relationship with her parents was already strained before Fern's 'disappearance' (p. 65). Harlow's casual comment that Rosemary's name means remembrance is unwittingly prophetic, as Rosemary possesses an exceptional memory and is thus acutely aware of her parents' shortcomings as she grows older. Her father is first portrayed as a man who undermines and belittles her, reacting in an 'exasperated' way when she calls him from the county jail after being in the wrong place at the wrong time: '[w]hat the hell did you do?' (p. 14). He is a 'professional man used to having his own way' (p. 15) who is emotionally detached and more scientific than supportive. Furthermore, his commitment to involving his entire family in the 'Fern/Rosemary Rosemary/Fern study' (p. 99) demonstrates his prioritisation of knowledge over the emotional wellbeing of others, even his two daughters for which the study is named. Though neither Rosemary nor Fowler depicts him as abusive or completely apathetic, he is so driven by the 'interest of science' (p. 92) that he is never even given a name in the novel, perhaps suggesting that his role in shaping Rosemary was marred by the emotional distance that made him unknowable. Ultimately, her father's experiment and commitment to it at all costs has a profound effect on Rosemary, and ultimately leads to the unravelling of her family.

The relationship between Rosemary and her mother is more complicated, but ultimately it is a more positive one for Rosemary's development and sense of self. Her mother is also unnamed in the novel, making her somewhat elusive to Rosemary and the reader. However, her efforts to bridge the emotional divide between her and Rosemary as adults encourage readers to view her in a more sympathetic light than Rosemary's father. She is much more protective of her children than her husband, maintaining that she could not conceive of abandoning Fern because she was 'deeply in love with you [Fern and Rosemary] both' (p. 287). Later, after both Fern and Lowell disappear, Rosemary recalls that her mother 'took [their] disappearance hard [...] I don't have the words for what it did to her. She's never even managed to pretend to recover' (p. 117). The implication that Rosemary's father recovered from the emotional trauma while her mother could not even pretend to move on further strengthens Fowler's portrayal of Rosemary's mother as the more emotionally intelligent parent. Her mother is also vocal in her disapproval of animal testing and other unethical scientific practices, which becomes a major point of contention between her and her husband. This divide between Rosemary's parents and their outlook is best encapsulated by the symbolism of their notebooks – her father's records are highly scientific and detached, whereas her mother's are 'not the dispassionate, careful observations from the field that [Rosemary] expected. They appeared to be our baby books' (p. 283). When these are later published as a children's book, they begin by foregrounding the familial, emotional connection: "'Fern and Rosemary are sisters. They live together in a big house in the country'" (p. 303) rather than the underlying scientific experimentation that her father was consumed by. Thus, although her mother's fraught marriage and turmoil over the disintegration of their family made it difficult for her to emotionally support Rosemary, Fowler reveals that her mother was nevertheless a deeply loving parent who felt a profound connection to all of her children.

Rosemary's father's implied neglect of his wife's welfare exacerbates the family's suffering, as her nervous breakdown after Fern's departure leaves the remaining children adrift and without adequate parenting. Nevertheless, Rosemary's mother partially redeems herself and has a more intimate relationship with the adult Rosemary when they move to South Dakota together and reunite with Fern. While her mother was catatonic throughout Rosemary's childhood, the fact that she later exhibits 'analeptic doses of righteous aggravation' (p. 6) is a positive shift, as she rebuilds her life and is ignited by 'righteous' rage at the

injustice caused by her husband. Rosemary finds comfort in her mother's presence being 'calm and not too sad' (p. 288), as neither of them can forget the past, but both have acknowledged that there is no value in being excessively sad about their circumstances. In this sense, Rosemary's mother's aphorism that they are 'completely beside [them]selves' (p. 98) has a double meaning in that she, her mother and Fern are united by their shared grief, confusion and anger.

Although Rosemary's childhood was not defined by particularly affectionate or stable parental relationships, their influence is a major force in shaping her identity. The emotional detachment of such unique circumstances undoubtedly cause rifts and scars that Rosemary struggles with well into adulthood, but ultimately her capacity to establish a fresh and honest connection to her mother is a testament to her strength of character. To this end, Fowler shows readers that sometimes one must process past traumas inflicted by one's parents in order to develop into a strong and capable person in the future.

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