

GOVERNMENT ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGE, KOVILPATTI – 628502

PG DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

STUDY MATERIAL FOR III B.A ENGLISH

WOMEN'S WRITING

SEMESTER – V, ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-21

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UNIT - I

POETRY

MAYA ANGELOU – PHENOMENAL WOMAN

Phenomenal Woman is a lyrical poem that sends out an important message to the world of convention and stereotype: empowerment comes from being confident in your own female skin. Maya Angelou published this poem in 1978 when it appeared in *And Still I Rise*, a collection of powerful poems that set many an oppressed woman free.

Analysis of Phenomenal Woman Stanza By Stanza

Stanza 1

It's interesting to note that the people this phenomenal woman wants to address initially are pretty women. The reason why is soon revealed - the speaker is plain looking herself, she's not cute or slender or fashionable in shape, but inside she knows she has those pretty women asking questions that are difficult to answer.

Already the speaker has a secret and although she can't reveal all, she can tell the pretty ones about her own physical attributes. It's to do with the reach, span, stride and curl - what is within her grasp, the full extent of her womanhood, the decisive way she gets about, the allure of her smile. The pretty ones can't quite believe what they hear but make no mistake, this is the speaker's one and only truth.

Stanza 2

Next up are the men who are instinctively drawn to the phenomenal woman, some even

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start to worship her, or else cannot sustain a standing position. There's a sort of spell cast over these males who act as honey bees around the hive.

There is chemistry at work here and the reason why the men are all a buzz? It's the fire, flash, swing and joy - the passionate heat as she looks at them, the gleaming white set behind the smile, the sensuality and sexuality, the enthusiasm of the dance.

Despite not being what society thinks she should be - ideally beautiful - the phenomenal woman can attract the opposite sex to her simply by entering a room.

Stanza 3

Concentrating on the male of the species again, the speaker perceives that even they can't put their finger on just why they're so attracted by this phenomenal woman.

They can ogle all they want, but this female's secret is hidden inside, it aren't visible on the exterior. Or is it? It's in the arch, sun, ride and grace - the way the spine is strong yet beautifully shaped, the power of a smile, life-affirming, the way her bosom is carried, comfortably, the smooth ease with which she manages life. Could it be the men are looking for something that cannot be identified with the senses? Could this be the phenomenal woman's spirit, her essence, her inner being?

Stanza 4

In a direct appeal to the reader, the speaker lays it on the line and attempts to clarify all that has gone on in the previous three stanzas. She can hold her head high because of what she is: proud of being an individual without the need to kowtow to society and its false stereotypes, its

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idea of what a beautiful female should like and aspire to be.

It's the click, bend, palm and need - the way she is full of energy and verve, the way she lets her hair fall naturally, her open and honest approach to life, the way her compassionate nature is a necessary thing.

The phenomenal woman's humility and respect for other's space, her dignity and inner strength mean she doesn't have to advertise her qualities or be brash and popular. No. Her essence, her well being, goes far deeper

JUDITH WRIGHT - WOMAN TO MAN

Judith Wright was a prolific Australian poet, critic, and short-story writer, who published more than 50 books. Wright was also an uncompromising environmentalist and social activist campaigning for Aboriginal land rights. She believed that the poet should be concerned with national and social problems. She died at the age of 85. The poem Woman to Man is about the fear of a woman in giving birth to a child. It clearly exhibits the psyche or the fear of a pregnant woman. The poem opens with the description of the child, a foetus. The woman, the mother, is anxious about the child. She describes the child as an eyeless labourer that grows inside the darkness of her womb. She holds the child in her womb. The foetus is said to be shapeless and selfless. Childbirth is compared with the resurrection day. The child is safe, silent and swift inside her womb. It is enthusiastically expecting to see the world or the light outside its mother's womb.

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The child, according to the mother, “is no child with a child’s face”. This might refer to the identity crisis of aborigines in Australia or could plainly mean that the mother is unaware of the gender of the foetus. They, the woman and her husband, have not yet named the child. They both exist with the hope that the child would bring into their lives. They call the child as their hunter and their chase. The child, to be born, would become the third member of their family.

The child is the product of the strength of the man and the flesh of her breast. The child is said to be the crystal of their eyes, meaning their hope and faith of their posterity or future. The child is compared with an intricate rose. The child gives them paradoxical notions of their life in future. The child is considered as the question and answer and as the maker and the made.

Being optimistic about the child’s future the poem culminates or concludes with a note of fear. The mother shudders at the thought of the child’s head butting out of her womb, to see the light reflected by the blade. This threat metaphorically informs us about the mother’s fear as an aborigine, who suffers the worldly life once been experienced to reality.

KISHWAR NAHEED - I AM NOT THAT WOMAN

"I am not that woman" is a feminist poem, written by Kishwar Naheed. As a Indo – Pakistani woman, she has described the plight of women in third world countries in a poignant way. But the poem is not just idle brooding over the fate of women; it is a strong declaration by a woman who has had enough and is now prepared to stand and break free of everything that shackles her. The poem is a ray of hope and confidence to women, with an empowering

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undertone that women are capable of rising above all the shackles, if they have the willpower; while mockingly pointing fingers at the duplicity and double dealings of a misogynistic society.

Poet:

Kishwar Naheed is a Urdu feminist poet. She was born and brought up in India and moved to Pakistan during the Partition. She saw the sufferings of women during the Partition with her own eyes, which left a deep impression on her and inspired her to become a feminist. She has won several awards for her poems.

The poem opens with the poet saying that she is not that woman on the advertisement posted, who sells socks and shoes. She reminds the men that she is the woman whom men hid in stone walls, while they roamed free like the breeze. But, the poet says that the men did not know that her voice couldn't be stopped by the stone.

This stanza points to the hypocrisy of men. They enjoy the sight of beautiful women on the advertisement posted, but keep women of their family confined in the house. They treat actresses as cheap women and the women of their family as "good, cultured" women. This shows their double standards. Also, they themselves roam freely without any restrictions, while they restrict women to the house, all in the name of protecting them. The poet picks this hypocrisy of men and boldly declares that the men did not know that her voice could not be stopped by stone, meaning that the restrictions did not stop her from rising questions and demanding her freedom.

Next, the poet says that she is the woman who the men crushed under the weight of customs and traditions, meaning that men used customs and traditions to make women suffer.

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But, the men did not know that light cannot be hidden in darkness, meaning that her knowledge, skills and confidence could not be kept hidden by tradition, just because she was a woman. She reminds men that they had picked flowers from her lap and planted thorns and embers, meaning the men extracted all good and positive things from her, while giving her only bad and negative things in return. The poet says that the men did not know that her fragrance could not be smothered by chains, meaning that just as fragrance from a flower can't be tied by chains, similarly she also cannot be tied down by customs.

The poet next says that she is the woman who was traded as an object in i.e., bought and sold. This atrocity was done in the name of her own chastity. Here the poet is speaking about the custom of arranged marriage and dowry, where daughters are sold to the richest and most prestigious families along with a huge sum of dowry. This tradition is defended saying that it is done to protect the chastity of women and keep them pure. The feelings and emotions of the woman getting married are not taken into consideration at all. The poet says that men did not know that she had the ability to walk on water while she appeared to be drowning. This means that her ability to continue progressing in her life despite several restrictions will appear like a miracle to men.

In the penultimate stanza, the poet says that she is the woman who was married off in a hurry, to get rid of a burden. She is again referring to the custom of arranged marriage, wherein parents treat their own daughter as a burden which should be got rid of. They marry off their daughter in a hurry and feel that they have completed their responsibility and got rid of a burden.

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The parents do not take their daughter's opinion in that matter. The daughter is a liability for her parents, not a loveable child. The poet says that the parents who do this must know that a nation of captive minds can never be free. It implies that a nation which is full of narrow minded and backward people can never be truly free or independent. The parents may think that they are free once they have married off their daughter, but in reality they are the prisoners of their own small minds and narrow thinking. Also, a nation filled with such people can never be independent and prosperous, even though it may be free from foreign rule. Here, the poet seems to be taking a dig at the apparent freedom of the subcontinent from British rule.

Lastly, the poet says that she is the commodity who was traded in her chastity, motherhood and loyalty. She means that all these ideals were forced upon her by the patriarchal society. She was just a commodity to be traded between two families. Chastity was expected of her, motherhood was forced upon her and loyalty was imposed on her. Her own desires were never taken into account. And all this was done to make her a good and cultured woman in front of the society. A woman is expected to be loyal to her husband throughout her life and is often forced to become a mother at a young age, even when she doesn't wish to. The only respectable status conferred upon women in a patriarchal society is that of a loyal and chaste wife and a mother. The individuality of women is suppressed and they are treated as commodities with certain specifications. The poet says that she has enough of it now, it is her time to flower free. She means that she will now spring forward with confidence and will blossom freely in life like a flower, without caring about any custom or tradition.

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The last line of the poem is again a satirical dig at the false virtuous nature of men, as the poet says that she is not the half naked woman on the poster, selling socks and shoes.

Analysis:

The poem is sure to pull at the heartstrings of its readers and make them sympathize with the women who live such a restricted life, while applauding the courage of the poet. It will leave a special profound impact on women readers from the Eastern countries. The reliability of the poem, along with the daring words of the poet is sure to give a push to the confidence of women and give them hope in life.

Conclusion:

Thus, it can be concluded that the poem "I am not that woman" is an apt description of the sad state of women in the Eastern countries, which also points out the deceptiveness of the patriarchal society, besides asserting that women can be free of this bunkum if they have confidence in themselves. The poem is realistic and relatable in its pinpointing of the various suffocating rules of the patriarchal society, while also giving women a hope of a breath of fresh air, if they have the audacity to question society and break free of its homburg norms.

CAROL ANN DUFFY - ORIGINALLY

"Originally" was first published in Carol Ann Duffy's collection of poetry called The Other Country (1990). It was later reprinted in her 2004 collection named New Selected Poems 1984-2004. Carol Ann Duffy's "Originally" is a poem about the experience of moving to a new

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country. In this poem, the speaker describes adjusting to a new country after initially not wanting to move away from home. The speaker also suggests that over time, people grow accustomed to their new surroundings.

A poem about being asked this question ... 'where do you come from originally?' This poem is the first poem in the book 'The Other Country'. Arguably the first poem in a book is usually a key poem to entice readers to delve further. In similar regard the first stanza of that poem is most important.

The poem is about the grief of a child in leaving their first home in the city to a place in the country. And the child remembers that time dearly and the journey is by car. The child is in a 'red room' so it could be reference to a red car. A child's room in a house is very important to that child. Her new home in transit as she rides with her parents could in fact refer to the space in the car. 'Red' is a highly emotive colour for example a colour which promotes anger in a bull. The car is also 'falling' 'through the fields as it travels personifying grieve.

Quite clearly there is a great contrast between the emotional state of the child and the joy expressed by her mother as the mother sings to the tune of her husband's turning wheels. The child's brothers appear to be younger but in great sympathy. And the contrast is again highlighted by the bawl of the brothers against the song of the mother. The brothers do not actually say 'home, home' – the 'bawl, bawl' states this meaning through these cries. Although the car is travelling away from the city – in the eyes of the children each mile away is a mile back to their original home. Back to the city, back to the street, back to their original home and

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back to their precious first rooms. The rooms are now vacant which adds poignancy. Again there is great contrast in the two directions associated with the change of location. Joy in one direction sorrow in another. It appears the child has something in her hands in the car to remind her of her room. She is holding the 'paw' (hand) of her precious mute toy-friend. A friend that is 'blind' to the predicament of the journey.

UNIT – II

PROSE

THE DAY THEY BURNED THE BOOKS

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Jean Rhys' "The Day They Burned the Books" is centered on the conflict of cultural identity. The narrator and her friend Eddie are both English descending children growing up in the Caribbean. The narrator is a full blown white English girl while Eddie has an English father and colored mother. Eddie's father is obsessed with his English heritage and expects Eddie to be too. Both children are unsure of their true cultural identity.

When people who had never seen England before talked about it around Eddie, he remained silent. This gave the narrator doubts about 'home.' Eddie claims that he does not like strawberries or daffodils, which are English, even though his father constantly talks about them. The narrator states that her relations with the few 'real' English boys and girls she had met were awkward. She says that if she called herself English, she was told that she is not English, but a horrid colonial. Both children were also ridiculed by the black children. Eddie's father built a room onto their house to store his books from England. Eddie's mother hated this room. When Eddie's father died, Eddie claimed the room and books as his own.

One day, Eddie's mother and their housekeeper Mildred went into the room and started pulling books off the shelves and piling them into two heaps. Eddie's mother planned to burn one of the piles of books. Eddie and the narrator tried to prevent the books from being burned by both of them grabbing and saving one.

Both children struggle with their cultural identity because they have English roots, but are growing up in the Caribbean. Eddie does not want to be English like his father, but when his father dies, he is angry at his mother for burning his father's English books. Those books are

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Eddie's closest tie to being English and he cherishes them. His father tries to force an English identity upon him while his mother tries to take his English identity away.

Jean Rhys had similar life experiences as the narrator and Eddie. She was raised in Dominica, but had a Welsh father and Creole mother. She felt out of place in Dominica, but estranged from her European roots. Since Rhys can relate to the characters in her story, this enabled her to become an influential women's writer of the twentieth century.

VIRGINIA WOOLF - SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

“Shakespeare's Sister” was a story about how woman are treated and what types of opportunities they have compared to men. Virginia Woolf describes a story about Shakespeare and what if he had a sister. What kind of life would she have? What kind of education would she be given? Would she be a playwright like her brother with the same kind of talent?

During the time of Shakespeare, his sister would live in a different kind of world compared to her male brother. Men were allowed to wife-beat. Women had arranged marriages from the time they were born. If they refused to be married to their picked husband, their father would beat them. Women were made to feel like their thoughts were stupid and that their ideas were not valued.

If Shakespeare had a sister, she would be declined from many things. She would not be allowed to go to school and learn the things that he learned. She would not be allowed to act and learn the stage. Because she is a woman, she is not allowed in theatre. She also would not be

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allowed to read, learn, or write. She would be expected to do housework, follow the rules of her family, and do the activities expected of “proper” woman. His sister would have no chance of learning the many things that Shakespeare learned. Therefore, if Shakespeare’s sister lived to grow up as he did, she would not be able to experience the same things because of her gender and would suffer.

Virginia Woolf described her story of Shakespeare’s sister and wrote that she would run away from her betrothed to be an actress and live a life that would be looked down upon by everyone. She would not live up to the greatness of her brother. Virginia Woolf encourages the readers of today to go out and accomplish things for the woman who were not granted the simple freedoms. However, woman years ago were forced to follow the same daily plans every day and do them without disagreement. Today woman are allowed to have different opinions and ideas and act on their impulses. She went against the rules of a common woman and spoke what she thought was the truth.

UNIT – III

SHORT STORY

NADINE GORDIMER’S A CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

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Pat Haberman has lived alone with her daughter Harriet in South Africa since her divorce, when Harriet was five. Harriet earned her degree at twenty and works in a literacy program for blacks. Pat is secretary to the dean of the medical school.

One day Harriet receives a letter from a political prisoner at Pretoria Central Prison. His name is Roland Carter and he has read an article Harriet published called "Literacy and the Media." She shows the letter to Pat, who encourages Harriet to respond. The correspondence continues for many months. Pat becomes vicariously involved; she tells her friends about the correspondence, wonders if perhaps Harriet has mentioned her in her letters.

Word comes that Roland has escaped from prison, and Pat is thrilled for him. But her friends warn her not to talk about her connection with the prisoner. For the short time that he is at large, she locks the doors and windows and becomes fearful. When Roland in fact comes to the house, Pat is overcome with remorse, and blames herself for the dangerous position her daughter is in.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD -AN IDEAL FAMILY

"An Ideal Family" was written by Katherine Mansfield and first published in the literary magazine the Sphere on August 20, 1921 and later incorporated into The Garden Party and Other Stories in 1922. Set in New Zealand, possibly in Wellington, "An Ideal Family" is an examination of self-worth within a family social structure as seen through the eyes of an aging patriarch.

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Mansfield, ever the modernist, often experimented with structure and narrative. Although the story appears structure-less, the third person narrative and the internal monologue of the protagonist, Mr. Neave, centers the plot's progression around the inner struggle of the main character as he comes to terms with his pending retirement. The third person narrative supports the plot, allowing the reader an aerial view of Mr. Neave's circumstances as well as intimate access to his inner thoughts as he navigates life outside of his office. Mr. Neave, a successful businessman, is reluctant to leave his profession and only source of true identity. His home life is dominated by his family, who he barely recognizes anymore, and he feels both unwelcome and out of place in their frivolous world of dinners and parties. Mr. Neave prided himself on his sense of duty and committed work ethic, which allowed for a bourgeois life of luxury for himself and his family. Now Mr. Neave sees his wife and adult children as if for the first time, realizing that he does not know them as well as he should and resents their dominate presence in his home. Life has passed him by. He isolated himself from his family in order to build his business, an investment that enabled him to successfully provided his family with everything they desired. Now that he is of retirement age; however, he finds he is a burden at home, corralled by his grown daughters into doing what they want and coddled by his wife who seems only passingly interested in his wellbeing. Mr. Neave's self-worth is solely invested in his business but now that the balance of work and play has been disrupted by his failing health, he fears the loss of both his identity as a businessman and the collapse of his company by his negligent son, Harold who lacks any sense of duty or familial responsibility.

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Duty and responsibility are important themes in the overall text, usually in association with a character like Mr. Neave who prides himself on his work ethic. Mr. Neave was motivated to work hard in order to support his family and to accommodate their extravagant lifestyle. Often complimented on his “ideal family,” Mr. Neave thought of his wife and children as an extension of his success in the business world. Having reached his own high standards he is disappointed by his children’s lack of discipline and ambition. He is especially disappointed in his son, Harold.

Mansfield uses effeminate language to describe Harold’s appearance. Mr. Neave thinks his son is unnaturally beautiful for a man with full lips and eyelashes. Some scholars believe this is an indication of bisexuality, which would have been most distressing from Mr. Neave’s conservative viewpoint. Mr. Neave believes Harold has been overly petted and pampered by the women in his life, especially by his mother and sisters. As a result he has adopted a careless attitude toward business and prefers a leisurely existence in direct conflict with his father’s point of view. How then can Mr. Neave leave his business to Harold in good consciousness not knowing if it will remain successful? If the business fails, who will support his family? Similarly none of his daughters are married or seem interested in leaving his home or starting a family of their own. They seem content living with one another and their mother while Mr. Neave pays for their parties, horses, sports, and seaside vacations.

Gender relations in "An Ideal Family" are very interesting. Mansfield has a talent for realism and masterfully illustrates various points of view on marriage and family in her collected works. She is especially adept at creating sympathy for characters, like Mr. Neave who would

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otherwise seems unsavory in the eyes of the opposite sex. Preoccupied with his work, Mr. Neave leaves the management of his home to his wife and adult daughters. In doing so he relinquishes any authority in the home and once he succumbs to the inevitability of age, his family has no senior place for him in the home. He is admonished by his daughter for walking home alone and over a long distance, suggesting that he is too old to do so. His wife supports this decision momentarily but does not argue the point. Instead she greets her husband and although they sit side by side it is clear that she is the head of the household and he a guest. Their relationship is stilted and almost impersonal. Mr. Neave, similarly, feels disconnected from his daughters who he is surprised to see have grown into very different women in comparison to their behavior as children. He is easily bullied by them to dress for dinner and is just as easily forgotten by them when he falls asleep in his room. Despite Mr. Neave's greatest attempts to prove himself-worthy of his family's attention and admiration, his physical exhaustion outweighs his intentions and he falls asleep twice in a short amount of time.

Feeling both lost and unappreciated within his family unit, Mr. Neave retreats into sleep and dreams of an old man walking up an endless flight of stairs. This surreal imagery is used to symbolize Mr. Neave's growing anxiety about his retirement and the unease he feels about the life he has led. Perhaps Mr. Neave feels he has failed his family by putting his business first. Mr. Neave finds it difficult to distinguish himself from his work and now that he will eventually spend most of his time at home, he finds that he is dreading the transition and fears he has no place of honor within his family's social structure. Yet Mr. Neave believes Harold will be the

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death of his business, which in turn will put a stop to his family's comfortable lifestyle. In order to maintain the status quo he will have to continue to work. Although he takes great pride in his job, Mr. Neave also recognizes his limitations due to age and like the old man he dreads the drudgery of continuing to live a life of self-imposed isolation. Like Sisyphus of Greek mythology that was forced to eternally roll a stone up a hill, Mr. Neave will carry on as he has always done because he feels he has no other choice.

ALICE MUNROE 'S THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Lives of Girls and Women is a short story cycle by Canadian author Alice Munro, first published in 1971. This series of interconnected short stories centers around a woman named Del Jordan as she grows up in the small Southern Ontario town of Jubilee. An outsider dissatisfied with small town life and looking to distance herself from her mother – who she's more like than she'd prefer to admit – the stories follow her as she matures and explores the world outside Jubilee.

Centering almost entirely around female characters with only a few male characters, it is considered one of the best works of feminist Canadian literature. Exploring themes of growing up, the complex relationship between mothers and daughters, and the issues women face in society, Lives of Girls and Women is considered one of Munro's most impressive works. It was adapted into a Canadian television movie in 1994, starring Tanya Allen as Del.

Lives of Girls and Women is told through a series of short stories, each chronicling a

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different key moment in Del's life as she grows from a young girl into womanhood. The first section, "The Flats Road", introduces Del and her small prairie town of Jubilee. She lives with her parents, her younger brother, and her Uncle Benny (who is not actually a relative, but living with the family after his divorce) in a small country home on the outskirts of town. Uncle Benny's plight is the first experience Del has with seeing someone's life fall apart, and it gives her a more skeptical outlook on the world. The second story, "Heirs of the Living Body", focuses on Del's life as her world begins to expand. She gets to know people beyond her immediate family, as more relatives visit. In particular, her aunts seem to have a negative attitude and discourage her from taking any chances and hoping for anything beyond day-to-day survival. She continues to try to find her own place in the family, the town, and the larger world.

The third story, "Princess Ida", focuses on Del's mother Addie. Addie is a door-to-door salesperson, hawking encyclopedias. She enjoys her job because it gives her freedom and helps her understand the world in a rational way. Del and her mother spend summers in the main town of Jubilee, and Del has come to both love and hate the place. Del's mother shares her own humble upbringing with her daughter, and Del learns that her mother was sexually abused by Dell's uncle Bill. Bill is still in the town, and later in this story visits Del and Addie. This forever changes the way Del views both her family and her town, who have kept such a terrible secret all this time.

The fourth story, "Age of Faith", tackles the question of religion in small town Canada. In Jubilee, attending church is as much a social affair as a religious one, and it illuminates the

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distinction between the town's in-crowd and the outcasts. People go to church to be seen by the rest of the town, and as such, the church is often abuzz with talk of who's there and what they're wearing, with faith a forgotten subject. Del is seeking a greater understanding of religion, and attends one church after another trying to find meaning. She winds up enjoying the theater of religious practice, but is still searching for meaning.

“Changes and Ceremonies” concentrates on Del's first crush on a classmate. This boy, Frank Wales, occupies Del's attention for a while. However, the sudden death of her teacher, Miss Farris, soon changes the town forever. It becomes clearer and clearer to Del that the town is keeping many secrets, and Jubilee is not the friendly, wholesome place it seems. She gets older, and in the titular story, “Lives of Girls and Women”, she meets the man who will become her first lover. This is Art Chamberlain, a worker at the local radio station. He's already involved with another woman, Fern Dogherty. Del's first relationship is filled with turmoil and is passionate, but inappropriate. In “Baptism”, she finds a healthier relationship in the form of Garnet French, a charismatic and worldly man. This concluding story sees Del undergo a rebirth, as she begins her life as an adult.

Finally, “Epilogue: The Photographer”, catches up with Del as an adult and shows that she's become a successful writer who has broadened her horizons outside Jubilee. The epilogue to Lives of Girls and Women begins by talking about suicides. “This town is rife with suicides,” Del would often hear her mother say. Though when she grew up Del figured that her mother was wrong and that Jubilee couldn't have more suicides than the statistical average, her mother could

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certainly go a while naming the men and women who'd killed themselves over the years (which, since Del is probably right about the statistical average, means this can all be very bleak). Del settles on two, the two by drowning, bringing us back to the terrifying climax in "Baptism." It also takes us back to "Changes and Ceremonies," where we already read about Miss Farris's suicide by drowning. Now we hear a bit about seventeen-year-old Marion Sherriff's.

Marion was a wonderful tennis player in the high school, so great, in fact, that they have a trophy named after her which they give to the best girl athlete in the school. Each year the winning girl's name is engraved on the trophy which is then put back in a case at the school. Why did Marion commit suicide? Was she pregnant, as many suspect? And what is the fate of these other girls? That question lingers in the book entitled *Lives of Girls and Women*, where so many of the women are drowning, even if they are still walking around on dry ground.

That's not where this epilogue goes explicitly. Rather, Del focuses on her first attempts at writing stories. That said, I think this is Munro's way of suggesting just how important it is to get at those other stories, the ones that appear nondescript, the ones that might look boring at first, the ones that result from Del's epiphany: People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable — deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum. In Del's first attempt at writing a novel she focuses on the Sherriff family because many in town, including her mother, always said, "Well, there is a family that has had its share of Tragedy!"

Marion died by drowning, her brother died an alcoholic, and another brother is in the asylum at Tupperton — "I picked on the Sherriff family to write about; what had happened to

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them isolated them, splendidly, doomed them to fiction.”

In this book, Marion's name has been changed to Caroline, which has a romantic sound. As we see the following lengthy, but important and extremely well crafted passage, the real Marion disappears quickly into this more romantic girl of fiction:

In the novel, a mysterious photographer comes to the high school:

The pictures he took turned out to be unusual, even frightening. People saw that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years. Most people fear him, yet Caroline runs after him. This is the man she falls for, the man who impregnates her. Then, one day she finds his car overturned in a ditch, empty. She walks to her death in the river. Caroline's brother in the asylum receives the photograph taken of Caroline: her eyes were white. This is the older Del recalling, with some degree of embarrassment, her first jabs at narrative:

“I had not worked out all the implications of this myself, but felt they were varied and powerful.” Of course, Caroline's story has absolutely nothing to do with the Sherriff's real life; it's derived from Del's own experiences in the library. Yet there is some connection to reality. This still comes from Jubilee, a place Del looks down on as she turns it into her “black fable.”

Then, one day she goes on a walk to see if her exam results have arrived. They haven't, but she passes the Sherriff's yard and Bobby Sherriff, home from the asylum for who knows how long, invites her to come in sit down for some cake. Del looks around and sees all the ordinary items: “The ordinariness of everything brought me up short, made me remember. This was the Sherriff's house.” She is struck by these items. She sees the door frame that Marion walked

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through on her way everywhere, including to the river. This is where I think the story comes back to the fate of all those other girls on that trophy “such questions persist, in spite of novels.” The ordinary, the mundane, the quotidian: that’s where Del — that’s where Munro — dwells when she becomes a writer. She makes lists of the ordinary, though “no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together — radiant, everlasting.”

This is an exceptional ending for at least two reasons: first, it ushers Del — and, with her, Munro into her vocation as a writer; and, second, it is the culmination of everything we’ve read before as we explored, by way of so many different avenues, the lives of girls and women. The last piece in the book, *Lives of Girls and Women*, indicates why Alice Munro deserves to be called sublime.

Above all, there is her concern with humility. In “Epilogue: The Photographer,” Munro mentions how at one point in her life, Del viewed everything her mother said “with skepticism and disdain.” The reader is left to judge, given what we have read in the previous seven stories, if Del has grown beyond that stage, or at least has grown into struggling with that attitude. Del’s mother is present in every story — sometimes brave, sometimes foolish, and always, completely, deeply human. The adult Del treats her gently, all the while telling us what the critical, unforgiving, adolescent Del thought. Two things stay with me: Del’s enormous, delicate understanding of her mother’s difficult upbringing and Del’s identification with her mother’s

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fierce intellectual ambition. When Del tells us she had been disdainful of her mother at one point, I think we see the book is proof this is a school of thought from which she has graduated.

In her stories, Munro privileges various points of view above her own: we understand both Del and her mother; we understand Fern and Naomi; we understand Garnet and Jerry Story; we understand Miss Farris and Mr. Boyce. We understand that each life has its push-pull struggle. Above that, Munro does not intrude.

This “epilogue” also tells the story of an encounter Del had at 18 with Bobby Sherriff, the local guy who had been in and out of the asylum. Bobby invites Del onto his porch to have some tea and cake. This encounter provokes in Del a variety of revelations about the nature of writing. The reader admires such honesty — that Del can admit what she used to be like, that she thought it was her due to be admired or wished well. Now she can indicate what she should have been like, and Munro offers this apologia for Del; as the very last words in her book, she offers a tribute to humility.

During this morning “tea” with Bobby Sherriff, Del realizes that the gothic novel she had been writing about his family was a failure. Some “damage had been done.” She means she knows the novel is a failure. She does not explain precisely what the damage was, except that we know she has fictionalized many of the details of Sherriff family story, and she knows, too, that while she used to feel the story she had written was “true,” she didn’t exactly know what that truth was.

Perhaps the truth was “I did not pay much attention to the real Sherriffs.” Perhaps the real

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truth was, as she realized in time, “the ordinariness of everything” is what mattered rather than using reality to create a clever take or make of real people a “black fable.” Slowly, Del, the writer, is learning the uses of writing — not to be clever, and not to get revenge, but instead writing should represent “every last thing.” It is every last thing and “every layer of speech and thought” that should be “radiant” and “everlasting.” It is what is represented that is important, not the author.

Another face of the sublime in Alice Munro has to do with her use of autobiographical detail. The writing is so plain-spoken, so understated, and so properly elliptical, that Munro herself is a shadow in the background. For instance, in “Epilogue” Munro opens with Del’s mother remarking, “This town is rife with suicides.” Several suicides are recounted. Del focuses on the death of Marion Sheriff, one of whose brothers died an alcoholic and the other spent a lot of time in the local asylum. Del tells how her mother’s boarder thought that a suicide at seventeen must be because of pregnancy. The boarder asks, “Otherwise, why drown you at seventeen?”

That question is not answered. Instead, Del shifts immediately to talking about how “the only thing to do with my life was write a novel.” But the idea of suicide is in the air — without books, without writing, what would life be? On the one hand, there is the life of the mind, and on the other, something as blank, something as black, perhaps, as the Wawanash River. But Munro does not say that. She leaves you to think it. That kind of shift is ordinary in Munro, and the reader is trusted to read between the shifts, to read into the juxtapositions. That is sublime.

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All of Lives of Girls and Women is true to that goal of every last thing “held still and held together.” Just to pick one thread from many, I want to look at how she views writing it, since writing is the topic of the “Epilogue” and also the topic of its Ars Poetica. Writing and reading comprise a vast terrain in Lives of Girls and Women. There are the tabloids that Uncle Benny reads and that little Del loves, too, and there are the newspapers, like the Jubilee Herald-Advance, that her mother reads. Her Uncle Craig keeps locked boxes full of precious newspaper clippings that will help him write his history. Del herself reads magazine articles, such as the one by a “famous New York psychiatrist.” There are the Bibles her grandmother wants the local poor man to read, the encyclopedias her mother wants the farm families to buy, and the nursing textbooks Naomi’s mother wants no one to read. There is the Book of Common Prayer, and there are the hymns sung at church, at home, at funerals and revivals, and there are children’s folksongs sung in the street. There is even a patriotic school song that Del teaches Uncle Benny. There is the library, where Wuthering Heights, The Life of Charlotte Bronte, Kristen Lavransdatter, Look Homeward, Angel, and Tennyson and Browning are “worlds of creation.” There are Del’s father’s copies of H.G. Wells’s Outline of History and Robinson Crusoe and also his James Thurber; there is Addie’s Tennyson, the gift to her from Miss Rush. There is the King Arthur in the Grade Seven Reader, there is Browning in the University exam.

Del is not the only reader: her mother favors reading that makes her think, like the magazine article “Heirs of the Living Body” that proposed that human organs could be transplanted. One year Addie joined a Great Books discussion group, and the next year enrolled

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in a correspondence course on the “Great Thinkers of history.” In contrast, Del’s father preferred to read the same books over and over, like personal bibles. Uncle Benny preferred the tabloids.

Fern, the boarder, has a stash of sexual how-to lore and a little collection of salacious verse like “The Lament of the Truckdriver.” Del herself prefers the library — she tells us: “I was happy in the library.” This is where she could read an adventure about an orphaned baby (The Winning of Barbara Worth), as well as a Norwegian epic by Nobel Prize winner Sigrid Undset.

Writing abounds in many forms in this book. Uncle Benny wants to write a letter, but he has to ask Del to write it, because he can’t write. There is Uncle Benny’s wife, who can barely write, but manages to get a letter to him after she has run away, asking, not for forgiveness, but for her favorite yellow sweater. Del’s classmate Frank Wales cannot spell but can sing like an angel. Del’s mother writes “op-ed” pieces for the paper and advocates things like free birth control for everyone. She also writes romantic descriptions for the paper, essays she signs “Princess Ida.”

Addie does the crossword puzzles, and she concocts writing games for her ladies’ tea party. As town clerk, Uncle Craig writes documents like licenses, but he also writes family trees and local history, both of which strike Del as lifeless. There are Uncle Craig’s sisters who tell stories. Uncle Bill writes, too; he writes a will in which he leaves a bequest of \$300 to his sister, blood money, really, meant to erase the damage he’d done as an adolescent, when he’d abused Addie in the barn. There are two important sermons: one by the Anglican minister on Easter Sunday, the one that makes no sense to Del, and is the beginning of the end of her experiment

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with religion; and one the revivalist gives about the sinner crossing above the fires of hell on a rope bridge, the threads of the bridge being continually nicked by the sinner's sins. And there is Del herself, known to be a great essay writer. Ghastly Mr. Chamberlain writes love letters of some sort to Fern.

The high school “writes” maxims on the schoolroom walls like “Time and Energy are my Capital; if I Squander them, I shall get no Other.” And Del writes a novel and locks it up in her uncle's lock box, having stashed her uncle's useless clippings and thousand pages of manuscript in the basement. Such are the layers of thought in reading and writing in *Lives of Girls and Women*, held still and held all together, ordinary and radiant and — most of all — believable.

UNIT – IV

FICTION

MEENA ALEXANDER' S NAMPALLY ROAD

Nampally Road” is the first novel of 39-year-old Meena Alexander, who was born in India and now lives in New York, where she teaches in several writing programs. Alexander has published three volumes of poems and a critical study, “Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley.”The heroine of her first piece of fiction is a 25-year-old woman just returned from graduate school in England to her native Hyderabad.

Mira Kannadical's favorite poet is Wordsworth. Like Aldous Huxley, who doubted that

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the great Romantic's benign view of nature would stand up in the carnivorous tropics, Mira is moved to wonder about the fate of Wordsworth's solitary spirit in the teeming land of India. Even as she tries to teach her class the value of Wordsworth's focus on the individual mind, Mira's own attention is distracted by the turmoil in the streets around her. A peaceful demonstration by orange-vendors has been brutally put down. A young woman is raped and her boyfriend murdered by policemen who throw her into jail to cover up their crimes. And to paper over the misery and abuses of power, the chief minister of the state is organizing a massive festival to celebrate his despotic regime as a shining light of progress. As if it were not enough that the urgency of public and political life seems to push Wordsworth to the margin of the picture, Mira is also disturbed by the thought that political big lies are the dark side of Romantic mythmaking.

Mira's own ambition is to be a writer, but her lover, Ramu, is scornful about her literary efforts and urges her to devote herself to politics as fervently as he does. A seasoned veteran of the protests against Indira Gandhi's state-of-emergency crackdowns, Ramu shows Mira a world of misery and injustice she cannot deny. She shares his outrage; furthermore, she loves him. But the sight of the abused victims makes Mira long for something beyond political action that she can do to fathom their suffering and ease their pain.

While Ramu promises that the people will rise up to avenge Rameeza, the rape victim, Mira senses that the woman is struggling with a pain too deep to be touched by his words, too deep to be expressed in her own words. When she is given paper and a pencil, she shakily

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proceeds to draw a pyramid of stones--which Mira believes is the very same image that has been haunting her own nightmares of late: stones of human flesh forming a pyramid, with water rising all around. A statue of Mahatma Gandhi stands to memorialize the spirit of the Indian independence movement. But in Mira's and Ramu's eyes, the leaders of the new India have more in common with the megalomaniac Nizam of Hyderabad, who forced slaves to dive into boiling water to retrieve pearls. Against this spirit of avarice, gaudiness and wanton cruelty Mira sets the gentle, almost unnoticed spirit of Durgabai, familiarly called "Little Mother," a doctor who ministers to the poor.

The actual mother of a fellow student of Mira's, Little Mother has invited Mira to stay with her in her house on Nampally Road. Little Mother labors mightily, working day in and day out to save lives, but there's only so much that she can do. This very short novel tackles a number of serious and complex themes without reaching any neat conclusions. Although Mira's attachment to Little Mother and her sympathy for the brutalized Rameeza seem to be setting her on the road to full-fledged feminism, Ramu still is portrayed appealingly, even when he is at his most arrogant. Mira's literary ambitions and her affinity for Wordsworth seem to have some relationship to her emerging powers of empathy for other human beings, but nothing more explicit or conclusive is made of this. Thus, for all the power of Alexander's portrayal of the harsh world her heroine inhabits, there is a tentative, refreshingly modest quality about this book that moves one to respect its honesty even when it's pacing falters or its focus blurs.

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UNIT - V

DRAMA

SUZAN-LORI PARKS' TOPDOG/UNDERDOG

Topdog / Underdog is a Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Suzan-Lori Parks that premiered on Broadway in 2002 and the West End in London. Parks, also the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship Genius Grant, was the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize. She was a protégé of writer and theorist James Baldwin. The initial off-Broadway show starred Don Cheadle (Booth) and Jeffrey Wright (Link). The Broadway cast of the show, directed by George C. Wolfe, featured hip-hop artist Mos Def taking over the role of Booth.

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The play is about two African-American brothers, Lincoln (nicknamed Link) and Booth. Their father thought that the relationship between John Wilkes-Booth and President Abraham Lincoln would be a funny joke. The choice of naming the children for an assassin and his target foreshadows how tumultuous the relationship between Link and Booth would become. Both brothers were abandoned by their parents and have depended on each other for survival since they were teens. Link, the older of the two brothers, was a master of Three-Card Monte.

Three-Card Monte is a card game usually used by confidence men to trick players into betting on whether they could identify a target card from three possible card choices. Link retired from the con after a friend was killed during a game. He found honest work at a carnival, ironically, impersonating Abraham Lincoln. People would pay to walk up behind him and shoot him. Although Booth is the younger brother, he is highly opinionated and has followed in his brother's footsteps as a con man. He is working toward being the best Three-Card Monte player ever. He is also a petty thief who steals from area stores.

The first half of the play focuses on Booth, who is trying to convince Link to leave his job at the carnival and get back to hustling Three-Card Monte. Booth thinks that since Link is a better card player than he is, they can work together to make even more money. We learn that Booth was recently kicked out by his ex-wife Cookie, and is living with his brother. His life consists of hustling and enjoying a life of pleasure while reminiscing about his childhood. Link doesn't like his brother's laziness or career path. This disconnect is the cause for the majority of their conflict. Most of what Booth wants for the future is tied to getting Link away from the

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carnival and back in the card game.

The major issues seem to come to a head and reach resolution in the second half of the play. Booth gets stood up by a woman that he has been seeing and gets hustled by his brother Link. All of these things seem to push him over the edge, and in a rage, Booth kills them both at the end of the play. There are a few major themes that Parks deals with in Top dog / Underdog; however, the overarching theme is race and class in America. Although both Link and Booth are African-American, they are named after an assassinated US President who brought an end to slavery, and his assassin.