

# British Literature: The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century PYQ 2022

Write short notes on:

## Q1. Heart of Darkness as an adventure fiction.

**Ans.** Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad is a novel that is often classified as a work of literary fiction, exploring themes of imperialism, colonialism, and the human psyche. However, it can also be viewed as an adventure story, as it features a journey into a dangerous and unknown territory and the challenges faced by the protagonist as he navigates this unfamiliar terrain.

The **novel's protagonist**, Marlow, sets out on a journey up the Congo River, deep into the heart of Africa, in search of the enigmatic Kurtz. The journey is fraught with danger and obstacles, including treacherous rapids, disease, and hostile tribes. Marlow's journey is a classic adventure tale, with elements of danger, exploration, and discovery.

**Moreover**, the novel also contains traditional elements of adventure fiction, including a sense of mystery and suspense. Marlow is on a quest to find Kurtz, a man who has become a legendary figure among the people of the Congo, and whose reputation precedes him. Kurtz is described as a man of great intelligence and ability, but also as a man who has gone mad in the jungle. As Marlow makes his way up the river, the mystery of Kurtz deepens, and the tension builds as Marlow gets closer to the truth.

**Furthermore**, Heart of Darkness contains elements of action and conflict, as Marlow must navigate the dangers of the jungle and the treachery of the company officials who have sent him on his mission. The conflict between Marlow and the company officials who seek to exploit the Congo for their own profit is a central theme of the novel.

In **conclusion**, while Heart of Darkness is primarily viewed as a work of literary fiction, it can also be read as an adventure story. The novel contains elements of danger, exploration, mystery, suspense, action, and conflict, all of which are hallmarks of the adventure genre. By combining these elements with its exploration of larger themes such as imperialism and the human psyche, Conrad has created a work that is both entertaining and thought-provoking.

## Q2. The Party at the end of Mrs Dalloway.

**Ans.** The party at the end of Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs Dalloway is a significant event that serves as a culmination of the themes explored throughout the book. The party is held by Clarissa Dalloway, the novel's protagonist, and is attended by a wide variety of characters, each with their own unique personalities and perspectives.

The party serves as a **microcosm** of the society that Clarissa inhabits, and Woolf uses it to explore the social dynamics and relationships between the characters. Through the interactions between the

party guests, Woolf highlights the complexities and contradictions of human nature, and the ways in which people are both connected and separated from one another.

The party also serves as a moment of catharsis for Clarissa. Throughout the novel, Clarissa has been plagued by a sense of dissatisfaction with her life, and has been grappling with the question of what it means to truly live. The party provides Clarissa with a sense of purpose and meaning, as she is able to bring together the people she cares about and create a sense of community and connection.

**Moreover**, the party is also a moment of reflection and introspection for the characters. As they mingle and converse with one another, they are forced to confront their own desires, fears, and insecurities. The party provides a space for the characters to explore their own thoughts and emotions, and to come to a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

In **conclusion**, the party at the end of Mrs Dalloway is a pivotal moment in the novel that serves as a culmination of the themes explored throughout the book. Through the interactions between the party guests, Woolf highlights the complexities of human nature and the ways in which people are both connected and separated from one another. The party also serves as a moment of catharsis and reflection for the characters, providing a space for them to explore their own thoughts and emotions.

### **Q3. The Boy in Waiting for Godot.**

**Ans.** In Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, the character of the boy plays a significant role in the narrative. The boy is a messenger who is sent by the character of Godot to inform the two protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, that Godot will not be coming today but will surely arrive tomorrow.

The boy is a **mysterious and enigmatic** figure, and the true nature of his relationship with Godot is never fully revealed. However, he serves as a physical connection between Vladimir and Estragon and the elusive character of Godot, who they are waiting for throughout the play.

**Moreover**, the boy also serves as a symbol of the passing of time and the inevitability of change. Each time he appears, he is slightly older and taller than before, indicating that time has passed since the previous meeting. This serves as a reminder to Vladimir and Estragon of the futility of their waiting and the inescapable nature of time.

**Furthermore**, the boy's appearances also serve to emphasize the theme of repetition and routine in the play. Each time he appears, he follows the same pattern of behavior, delivering the same message and then departing. This repetition serves to emphasize the cyclical nature of time and the monotony of the characters' existence.

In **conclusion**, the boy in *Waiting for Godot* is a significant character who serves to connect the two protagonists with the elusive character of Godot. He also serves as a symbol of the passing of time and the inevitability of change, and emphasizes the themes of repetition and routine in the play.

### **Q4. Critically comment with reference to the context:**

**"Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long**

**Whatever is begotten, born and dies.**

**Caught in the sensual music all neglect**

**Monuments of unageing intellect"**

**Ans.** The quoted lines are from the poem "**Sailing to Byzantium**" by W.B. Yeats, and they present a contrast between the physical world of sensory experience and the realm of intellectual and artistic creation. The lines suggest that while the pleasures of the flesh are celebrated and enjoyed during the summer months, the deeper and more enduring achievements of the intellect are often overlooked or neglected.

The lines highlight the tension between the transience of the physical world and the enduring nature of intellectual and artistic creations. The phrase "whatever is begotten, born and dies" encompasses all living creatures and suggests their impermanence and mortality. In contrast, the phrase "monuments of unageing intellect" suggests that works of art and intellect endure beyond the fleeting pleasures of the physical world.

The context of the poem is significant to understanding the meaning of these lines. "Sailing to Byzantium" was written in the early 1920s, a time when Yeats was grappling with the question of how to reconcile the temporal nature of human existence with the desire for transcendence and immortality. The poem can be seen as a meditation on the nature of art and the human quest for immortality, as the speaker of the poem seeks to escape the transience of the physical world and find a home in the "artifice of eternity".

In conclusion, the quoted lines from "Sailing to Byzantium" by W.B. Yeats present a contrast between the physical world of sensory experience and the realm of intellectual and artistic creation. The lines highlight the tension between the transience of the physical world and the enduring nature of intellectual and artistic creations. The context of the poem, which deals with questions of human mortality and the quest for immortality, is significant to understanding the meaning of these lines.

#### **Q5. Camus' ideation of suicide in "Absurdity and Suicide"**

**Ans.** In his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus," Albert Camus discusses the idea of suicide as a response to the absurdity of human existence. Camus suggests that the only truly serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide, because it is the only question that really confronts the absurdity of human life.

Camus argues that the **absurdity** of human existence arises from the conflict between our innate desire for meaning and purpose in life and the inherent meaninglessness of the universe. He argues that this conflict leads to a sense of alienation and despair, and that suicide may seem like a logical response to this sense of meaninglessness.

However, Camus ultimately rejects suicide as a solution to the problem of the absurd. He argues that suicide is an admission of defeat, a surrender to the meaninglessness of the universe. Rather than accepting this defeat, Camus suggests that we should embrace the absurdity of human existence and find meaning and purpose in the struggle itself.

Camus' ideation of suicide in "Absurdity and Suicide" can be seen as a challenge to traditional philosophical notions of meaning and purpose in life. By emphasizing the absurdity of human existence, Camus is calling for a radical reevaluation of our values and priorities. He argues that we must reject the comforting illusions of religion and metaphysics and instead confront the meaninglessness of the universe head-on.

In conclusion, Camus' ideation of suicide in "Absurdity and Suicide" is a provocative and challenging argument for the importance of confronting the absurdity of human existence. While rejecting suicide as a solution to the problem of the absurd, Camus challenges us to embrace the struggle itself and find meaning and purpose in the face of meaninglessness.

**Q6. Conrad's Heart of Darkness is not about Kurtz or the brutality of the Belgian officials but about Marlow, its narrator." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.**

**Ans.** The interpretation that "Conrad's Heart of Darkness" is more about Marlow than Kurtz or the Belgian officials is a valid one. While the novella contains a vivid depiction of the horrors of colonialism, it is Marlow's perspective that shapes the narrative and its themes.

Marlow serves as a frame narrator, recounting his experiences traveling up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, a respected ivory trader who has become a near-mythical figure in the eyes of those who have heard of him. Marlow's journey becomes a journey of self-discovery, and the story ultimately becomes an exploration of the human condition, rather than a condemnation of colonialism.

Marlow is a complex character who struggles with his own morality, and his perspective on the events he witnesses is filtered through his own biases and beliefs. His narration is marked by ambiguity and irony, leaving the reader to interpret the events for themselves. In this way, "Heart of Darkness" is as much about the unreliable nature of storytelling as it is about the brutality of colonialism.

While Kurtz and the Belgian officials are essential to the novella's plot and themes, it is ultimately Marlow's narration that drives the story and gives it its emotional weight. Therefore, the statement that "Conrad's Heart of Darkness" is more about Marlow than the other characters is a reasonable interpretation.

**Q7. Critically examine the binary between memory and history in Woolf's Mrs Dalloway.**

**Ans.** In Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway," the binary between memory and history is a significant theme that runs throughout the novel. The novel explores how individual memories and personal experiences intersect with the larger narrative of history.

The character of Clarissa Dalloway is a key figure in the novel, as she serves as a representative of the memory side of the binary. Clarissa's memories of her past experiences shape her present and influence her actions. Her recollections of her youth and her relationships with Peter Walsh and Sally Seton are a recurring motif throughout the novel. Clarissa's memories are portrayed as deeply personal and subjective, giving readers a sense of the emotional weight that personal history can hold.

On the other side of the binary is the character of Septimus Warren Smith, a veteran of World War I who suffers from shell shock. Septimus's experiences of the war and his subsequent mental illness represent the historical side of the binary. Septimus's story is presented in a fragmented and disjointed manner, highlighting the difficulty of capturing historical events in a coherent narrative. Woolf depicts the impact of the war on individuals like Septimus and the larger social and cultural changes that it brought about.

**However**, the binary between memory and history is not presented as a straightforward opposition in the novel. Instead, Woolf suggests that the two are intertwined and cannot be fully separated. The character of Clarissa is deeply aware of the historical moment in which she lives, and the social and cultural changes that are taking place around her. Likewise, the character of Septimus's experiences of the war are deeply personal and subjective, rooted in his own memories and emotions.

In **conclusion**, Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway" presents a complex and nuanced exploration of the binary between memory and history. The novel suggests that the two are deeply interconnected, and that personal memories and historical events shape and influence each other.

**Q8. Beckett in Waiting for Godot posits an endless continuum of ennui and despair from which there is no escape". Discuss.**

**Ans.** Waiting for Godot is a play written by **Samuel Beckett**, first published in 1952. The play is an absurdist drama that explores the themes of human existence, the search for meaning, and the futility of human effort. One of the central ideas that Beckett presents in the play is the idea of an endless continuum of ennui and despair from which there is no escape.

The two main characters of the play, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting for a character named Godot who never arrives. Throughout the play, the two characters engage in various activities and conversations that highlight their boredom and lack of purpose. They pass the time by talking about their lives, playing games, and contemplating suicide. However, they never take any significant action to improve their situation.

Beckett's portrayal of the characters' endless waiting and the repetition of their actions and conversations emphasizes the idea that they are trapped in a cycle of ennui and despair. The characters' lack of agency and inability to change their circumstances reinforce the notion that there is no escape from their situation.

The play's setting, a barren wasteland, also contributes to the feeling of despair and hopelessness. The desolate landscape and the lack of any signs of life suggest that the characters are isolated and cut off from the rest of the world.

The title character, Godot, is a symbol of hope and salvation, but he never appears, leaving the characters in a state of perpetual waiting and uncertainty. This lack of resolution and closure reinforces the idea that there is no escape from the characters' situation.

In **conclusion**, Beckett's Waiting for Godot presents an endless continuum of ennui and despair from which there is no escape. The play's portrayal of the characters' repetitive actions, lack of agency, and isolation reinforces the notion that they are trapped in a cycle of hopelessness. The play's open-ended conclusion and the absence of any resolution suggest that there is no way out of this endless cycle.

**Q9. "T. S. Eliot's poetic journey chronicling the travails of the western white male of the twentieth century gradually moves away from an exploration of the individual psyche to broad generalizations about the human condition." Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.**

**Ans.** T.S. Eliot is one of the most important poets of the 20th century, and his work has been widely studied and analyzed. One common interpretation of Eliot's work is that his poetic journey chronicles the travails of the western white male of the 20th century, and that this journey gradually moves away from an exploration of the individual psyche to broad generalizations about the human condition. While there is some truth to this interpretation, it is also an oversimplification that overlooks many of the complexities of Eliot's work.

It is true that Eliot's early poetry, such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," focuses primarily on the experiences and psyche of an individual white male. The poem explores the themes of isolation, alienation, and the fragmentation of modern life through the experiences of Prufrock, a character who embodies many of the anxieties and insecurities of the modern individual. However, as Eliot's career progressed, his poetry became more concerned with broader philosophical and cultural themes.

In his later work, such as "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets," Eliot grapples with themes that are more universal in scope. These poems explore the nature of time, the relationship between the individual and society, and the role of tradition and history in shaping human experience. While these poems still reflect Eliot's own experiences and concerns as a white male of the 20th century, they are not limited to this perspective.

In fact, **one of the strengths** of Eliot's work is its ability to transcend the limitations of any one individual perspective and to offer insights into the human condition more broadly. Eliot's poetry is often characterized by its complex and multi-layered imagery and allusions, which draw on a wide range of literary and cultural traditions. This depth and complexity allow Eliot's work to resonate with readers from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, and to speak to universal themes and concerns.

In **conclusion**, while it is true that T.S. Eliot's early work focuses primarily on the experiences of the individual white male, his later poetry moves beyond this perspective to explore broader philosophical and cultural themes. Eliot's work is characterized by its depth and complexity, and it offers insights into the human condition that transcend any one individual perspective.

**Q10. Discuss with reference to Virginia Woolf's essay "On Being Ill," the marginalization of illness in literature and the unique perspectives to the world that illness reveals.**

**Ans.** In her essay "On Being Ill," Virginia Woolf discusses how illness is often marginalized in literature, despite its profound impact on our lives. She argues that writers have ignored the topic of illness and that it should be given more attention because it provides unique perspectives on the world that are often overlooked.

Woolf observes that literature often portrays illness as something to be feared or avoided, rather than something that is a part of human experience. She notes that illness is often viewed as a weakness or a defect, and that it is therefore seen as something shameful or embarrassing. This view has led to the marginalization of illness in literature, with writers tending to focus on the more "heroic" aspects of life.

However, Woolf argues that illness is actually a transformative experience that can provide us with new insights and perspectives on life. She suggests that illness forces us to slow down and pay attention to our bodies and minds in a way that we might not otherwise do. Through illness, we become more aware of our own mortality and the fragility of life, and we gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things.

Woolf's own struggles with mental illness and her experiences of being hospitalized give her a unique perspective on the world. She suggests that illness can provide us with a heightened awareness of our surroundings and a more acute sensitivity to the nuances of language and meaning. She describes how the experience of being ill can lead to moments of intense clarity and insight, in which we are able to see the world in a new light.

In **conclusion**, Woolf's essay "On Being Ill" highlights the marginalization of illness in literature and suggests that this is a missed opportunity for writers. She argues that illness provides a unique perspective on the world, and that it is something that should be explored more deeply in literature. By paying attention to the experiences of those who are ill, writers can gain new insights into the human condition and create a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be human.