

Popular Literature PYQ 2021

Q1. In what way does *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* digress from the classic model of detective fiction. What is the significance of Agatha Christie's strategy in doing so? Discuss.

Ans. "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" by Agatha Christie is known for its departure from the classic model of detective fiction, specifically the "fair play" approach where the reader is provided with all the necessary clues to solve the mystery along with the detective. This novel's unconventional narrative strategy and surprising reveal of the murderer challenge the traditional conventions of the genre. The significance of Agatha Christie's strategy lies in her ability to subvert reader expectations and create a thought-provoking exploration of the detective genre itself. **Here's how the novel digresses and its significance:**

Digressions from Classic Detective Fiction:

Unreliable Narrator: The novel is narrated by Dr. James Sheppard, who turns out to be an unreliable narrator. He is directly involved in the investigation and conceals crucial information from the reader. This goes against the principle of a trustworthy narrator in classic detective fiction.

Missing Clues: Christie intentionally withholds vital clues from the readers. The nature of the narrative prevents readers from accessing all the relevant information needed to solve the mystery, which is contrary to the "fair play" convention.

Twist Ending: The novel's ending reveals that the narrator himself is the murderer. This is a radical departure from the classic detective formula, where the detective is usually an impartial investigator. The narrative twist challenges readers' assumptions and redefines their understanding of the characters.

Significance of Agatha Christie's Strategy:

Subversion of Expectations: Christie's departure from the classic model serves as a deliberate subversion of reader expectations. By breaking away from established norms, she keeps readers engaged, surprised, and questioning their assumptions about the genre.

Reflection on Narration: The novel's strategy prompts readers to question the reliability of narrators in detective fiction and literature as a whole. It demonstrates how the viewpoint of the narrator can shape the reader's interpretation and understanding of events.

Ethical Considerations: By making the narrator the murderer, Christie raises ethical questions about the limits of detective involvement and the potential for bias. The reader is compelled to consider the ethics of the detective's role in solving crimes.

Deconstruction of Formula: "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" deconstructs the traditional detective formula, inviting readers to think critically about the genre's conventions. This innovation challenges the notion of a static genre and showcases Christie's ability to experiment while still delivering a compelling mystery.

Literary Impact: The novel's unconventional approach garnered attention and discussion, cementing Christie's reputation as a master of mystery writing. Its impact can be seen in the subsequent

evolution of detective fiction, as writers explored more complex and unconventional narrative techniques.

In conclusion, "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" significantly deviates from the classic model of detective fiction by using an unreliable narrator and concealing crucial clues. Agatha Christie's strategy in doing so is impactful as it challenges reader expectations, prompts reflection on narrative reliability, raises ethical considerations, and deconstructs the traditional genre formula. This departure showcases Christie's ingenuity as a writer and her contribution to the evolution of mystery literature.

Q2. The instability of language in Through the Looking Glass questions the foundations of our emphasis on reason, order and propriety. Discuss.

Ans. "Through the Looking-Glass" by Lewis Carroll is a sequel to "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and continues to explore themes of logic, language, and the absurd. The instability of language in the book serves as a tool to question traditional concepts of reason, order, and propriety. **Carroll's use of language and wordplay challenges the foundations of these concepts in several ways:**

1. Wordplay and Nonsense:

Carroll's novel is filled with wordplay, puns, and nonsensical language. For example, the poem "Jabberwocky" is composed of invented words that evoke imagery without clear meanings. This undermines the traditional understanding of language as a precise tool of communication and challenges the emphasis on reason and order that typically underlie language use.

2. Contradictions and Paradoxes:

Alice frequently encounters characters who speak in contradictions and paradoxes. For instance, the White Queen's statement "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" exemplifies the absurdity of language that contradicts rational thought. Such instances blur the boundaries between logic and illogic, suggesting that language itself can be unstable and unreliable.

3. The Red Queen's Logic:

The Red Queen introduces Alice to a form of logic where it's possible to believe multiple contradictory statements before breakfast. This challenges the notion of logical consistency and highlights the arbitrary nature of rules that dictate reasoning. This type of logic undermines the idea of a rigidly ordered world based on reason and propriety.

4. Humpty Dumpty's Definitions:

In the novel, Humpty Dumpty famously declares that words mean whatever he wants them to mean. This concept illustrates the arbitrary nature of language and how its meanings can be manipulated. This challenges the notion of language as a fixed and stable system for communication.

5. Absurd Conversations:

Throughout the novel, Alice engages in conversations that follow unconventional and erratic patterns. These exchanges demonstrate how language can be unpredictable and lack coherence, highlighting its instability and defying traditional expectations of rational discourse.

6. The Looking-Glass World:

The entire premise of the looking-glass world challenges conventional notions of reality and order. In this alternate reality, the laws of physics and logic are inverted, leading to absurd and nonsensical situations. This mirrors the instability of language and its ability to subvert expected norms.

In conclusion, the instability of language in "Through the Looking-Glass" is used by Lewis Carroll to question the foundations of reason, order, and propriety. Carroll's manipulation of language through wordplay, contradictions, and paradoxes challenges the notion of language as a stable and rational tool. This destabilization of language serves as a means to explore the absurdity of conventional norms and highlight the fluid boundaries between reason and nonsense in the world of Wonderland.

Q3. How does Bradbury make use of „time travel“ as a device in “The Sound of Thunder”? Give a reasoned answer.

Ans. In Ray Bradbury's short story "A Sound of Thunder," the concept of time travel serves as a central device that drives the narrative and explores themes related to the consequences of actions, the fragility of time, and the potential impact of even the smallest choices. Bradbury employs time travel to create a thought-provoking and cautionary tale. **Here's how he makes use of time travel as a device:**

1. The Butterfly Effect:

One of the key elements of the story is the butterfly effect, which refers to the idea that even a small action in the past can have far-reaching and unintended consequences in the future. Time travel enables the characters to go back to the prehistoric era, where their seemingly insignificant actions result in changes that reverberate through time. The concept of the butterfly effect illustrates the interconnectedness of events and emphasizes the potential consequences of altering the past.

2. Dramatic Tension:

Time travel creates dramatic tension as the characters embark on a dangerous journey into the past. The uncertainty of how their actions will impact the future adds suspense to the narrative. The readers are aware of the potential dangers even when the characters may not fully comprehend them, leading to a sense of impending disaster.

3. Moral Dilemmas:

The time travel device also raises moral dilemmas. The characters grapple with the ethical implications of altering the past and potentially disrupting the course of history. This prompts reflection on the responsibility that comes with the ability to manipulate time.

4. Reflection on Human Hubris:

Time travel in the story reflects the human desire to control and manipulate nature, even in the face of the unknown. The arrogance of believing that humans can change the past without consequences serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked hubris.

5. Theme of Unpredictability:

Bradbury uses time travel to emphasize the unpredictability of outcomes. The characters expect to return to a world that is unchanged, but they discover that their actions have led to unexpected and catastrophic changes. This underlines the fragility of time and the difficulty of fully comprehending the implications of one's actions.

6. Reflection on Time and Fate:

The story prompts contemplation on the nature of time and fate. The characters' attempts to change the past and their subsequent realization that some events are inevitable underscore the idea that time is both fluid and fixed, raising philosophical questions about the interplay between free will and destiny.

In "The Sound of Thunder," Ray Bradbury effectively uses the concept of time travel as a device to explore complex themes and ideas. By incorporating the concept of the butterfly effect, creating dramatic tension, posing moral dilemmas, reflecting on human hubris, highlighting unpredictability, and prompting reflection on time and fate, Bradbury crafts a thought-provoking narrative that invites readers to consider the consequences of their actions within the framework of time and history.

Q4. Discuss Bhimayana as an instance of alternate historiography on the life of B.R Ambedkar.

Ans. "Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability" is a graphic novel that presents an alternative historiography of the life of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, focusing on his experiences of untouchability and social oppression. The graphic novel, created by artists Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam along with writer Srividya Natarajan, offers a unique perspective on Ambedkar's life and his struggle against caste-based discrimination. Here's how "Bhimayana" serves as an instance of alternate historiography:

1. Shifting Focus to Marginalized Experiences:

"Bhimayana" diverges from traditional biographies that often emphasize Ambedkar's accomplishments as a jurist, scholar, and politician. Instead, it places a spotlight on the experiences of untouchability and social exclusion that shaped his life. This approach aims to foreground the everyday realities of marginalized individuals rather than focusing solely on the achievements of prominent figures.

2. Graphic Narrative Format:

The graphic novel format of "Bhimayana" adds an innovative dimension to its alternate historiography. Through visual storytelling, it engages readers with a different mode of representation. The use of illustrations alongside text allows for a more immersive and emotive portrayal of Ambedkar's life and the challenges he faced.

3. Personal and Collective Narratives:

The graphic novel combines the personal experiences of Ambedkar with broader narratives of caste-based discrimination and untouchability. It delves into the emotional impact of social oppression while also illustrating how these experiences contributed to Ambedkar's commitment to social justice and his efforts to dismantle the caste system.

4. Highlighting Subaltern Voices:

"Bhimayana" incorporates Ambedkar's own words as well as the voices of other Dalit activists and thinkers. By amplifying these voices, the graphic novel offers a platform for marginalized perspectives that have often been marginalized or suppressed in mainstream historical accounts.

5. Deconstructing Historical Heroes:

While Ambedkar is celebrated as a hero in Indian history, "Bhimayana" resists turning him into a one-dimensional figure. It presents his struggles, doubts, and internal conflicts, emphasizing his humanity rather than idealizing him. This approach contributes to a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of historical figures.

6. Addressing Omissions in Conventional History:

"Bhimayana" addresses the omissions and erasures in conventional historiography that have often marginalized the experiences of Dalits and other oppressed communities. It seeks to rectify historical injustices by shining a light on these neglected aspects of history.

In conclusion, "Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability" serves as an instance of alternate historiography by shifting the focus from the conventional heroic narrative of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to his experiences of untouchability and the broader issue of caste-based discrimination. Through its graphic novel format, the incorporation of personal and collective narratives, and the spotlight on marginalized voices, "Bhimayana" provides a more inclusive and nuanced perspective on the life and struggles of Ambedkar, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of history and social justice.

Q5. What does Darko Suvin mean by "cognitive estrangement" and its use in Science Fiction. Support your answer with examples from any one SF story in the paper.

Ans. Darko Suvin's concept of "cognitive estrangement," often associated with science fiction (SF), refers to the element of defamiliarization or estrangement that SF employs to challenge readers' preconceived notions and provoke critical thinking about the familiar world and its potential alternatives. Suvin suggests that SF creates a cognitive distance between the reader's reality and the speculative elements presented in the story, enabling readers to perceive their own world from a new perspective. This engagement with the unfamiliar prompts readers to reevaluate their assumptions and understandings.

In the context of science fiction, "cognitive estrangement" serves to:

Prompt Critical Thinking: By presenting alternative worlds, technologies, or societies, SF encourages readers to question the status quo and consider the implications of different choices and possibilities.

Highlight Ideological and Social Constructs: SF often portrays speculative societies that differ significantly from our own, exposing the constructed nature of our social, political, and cultural systems.

Engage Imagination: By exploring imaginative scenarios, SF stimulates readers' creativity and encourages them to envision possibilities beyond their current reality.

Now, let's consider the concept of "cognitive estrangement" in action through an example from the science fiction story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" by Ursula K. Le Guin:

In "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," Le Guin presents readers with the idyllic city of Omelas, where everyone's happiness and well-being depend on the intense suffering of a single child. The story challenges readers' moral and ethical beliefs by asking them to consider whether it's justifiable to allow the suffering of one for the happiness of many.

Here's how "cognitive estrangement" operates in this story:

Defamiliarization of Ethical Norms: The story deliberately presents a situation that goes against widely accepted ethical norms and values. Readers are confronted with the disconcerting idea that a seemingly utopian society could be built upon an act of cruelty.

Estrangement from Familiar Morality: By placing readers in the position of confronting a morally complex dilemma, the story distances them from their usual moral frameworks. This estrangement prompts readers to reevaluate their ethical beliefs and consider alternative perspectives.

Prompting Reflection on Real-World Analogies: The story's speculative element encourages readers to reflect on real-world situations where ethical compromises might be made for the greater good. This prompts readers to consider the ethical challenges faced by society and the implications of such choices.

In "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," "cognitive estrangement" encourages readers to examine the trade-offs between happiness and suffering, leading to critical reflection on the complexity of moral decision-making. Through this estrangement from the familiar, Le Guin invites readers to challenge their assumptions and engage with the story's ethical dimensions in a deeper way.

Q6. Critically comment on the use of „formula“ in Popular Fiction. Discuss in relation to any two texts which you have studied in this paper.

Ans. In the realm of popular fiction, the use of formulaic elements has been both praised for its ability to satisfy reader expectations and criticized for potentially limiting creativity and depth. Formulas in popular fiction are recurring patterns, structures, or conventions that are commonly found in specific genres. While they can provide a sense of comfort and predictability for readers, they also pose challenges in terms of originality and innovation. **Let's discuss the use of formulas in popular fiction in relation to two texts: "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" by J.K. Rowling and "Twilight" by Stephenie Meyer.**

"Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" by J.K. Rowling:

J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series is a prime example of using formulaic elements in popular fiction. The first book, "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," follows a classic hero's journey formula:

The Ordinary World: Harry's life with the Dursleys.

The Call to Adventure: Harry receives a letter from Hogwarts.

Refusal of the Call: The Dursleys try to prevent Harry from attending Hogwarts.

Crossing the Threshold: Harry enters the magical world.

Tests, Allies, Enemies: Harry makes friends, faces challenges, and discovers enemies.

Approach to the Inmost Cave: Harry confronts challenges leading up to the climax.

Ordeal: The final confrontation with Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest.

Reward (Seizing the Sword): Harry defeats Voldemort and saves the Stone.

The Road Back: Returning to the ordinary world with newfound knowledge.

Resurrection: Harry is revived after his encounter with Voldemort.

Return with Elixir: Returning to the Dursleys with a changed perspective.

"Twilight" by Stephenie Meyer:

Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" also follows a formulaic pattern, particularly within the young adult paranormal romance genre:

Introduction to the Ordinary World: Bella's move to Forks.

Meeting the Special Love Interest: Bella's initial encounter with Edward.

Attraction and Complications: Bella and Edward's growing bond and the revelation of his vampire nature.

Supernatural Element Intensifies: Bella's interactions with other vampires.

Crisis and Climax: The conflict with the vampire James.

Resolution: The confrontation with James is resolved.

Denouement: Bella's transformation into a vampire is foreshadowed.

Critical Commentary on Formulaic Elements:

Formulas in popular fiction have both positive and negative implications:

Positive Aspects:

Comfort and Familiarity: Formulas provide a sense of familiarity and comfort to readers who enjoy genre-specific conventions.

Predictability: Formulas allow readers to anticipate certain plot developments and feel a sense of satisfaction when their expectations are met.

Accessibility: Formulas often make stories accessible to a wide audience, drawing in readers who enjoy the specific genre's conventions.

Negative Aspects:

Lack of Originality: The use of formulas can lead to clichés and unoriginal storytelling, where plots and character arcs become predictable.

Limited Creativity: Authors might feel constrained by formulaic expectations, leading to a lack of innovation or risk-taking.

Shallow Themes: Formulaic elements can sometimes limit the exploration of deeper themes, as the focus may be more on adhering to genre conventions.

In conclusion, the use of formulas in popular fiction, as seen in "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" and "Twilight," has both merits and drawbacks. While formulas can provide comfort, accessibility, and predictability, they also run the risk of stifling creativity and leading to unoriginal storytelling. The challenge lies in striking a balance between satisfying genre expectations and offering fresh, imaginative narratives that engage readers on multiple levels.