

1 Write a critical comparison of the following two poems.

A youth for Jane with ardour sighed

A youth for Jane with ardour¹ sighed,
The maid with sparkling eye;
But to his vows she still replied,
'I'll hear you by and by².'

'Suspense' he cries 'my bloom decays,
And bids my spirits fly;
Now hear my vows:' ... but still she says
'I'll hear you by and by.'

5

At length her frowns his love subdue,
He shuns her scornful eye,
And Emma seeks, who'll hear him woo
Both now and by and by.

10

And soon to church he leads the maid,
When, lo! he sees draw nigh
The now repentant fair who said
She'd hear him by and by.

15

'Hear me,' she cries: 'no more in vain
Thy heart for me shall sigh!' ...
'I'm busy now,' said he ... 'but, Jane!
I'll hear you by and by.'

20

Amelia Opie (1769–1853)

¹ *ardour*— passion

² *by and by*— soon, but not immediately

Dead Love

Oh never weep for love that's dead
 Since love is seldom true
 But changes his fashion from blue to red,
 From brightest red to blue,
 And love was born to an early death 5
 And is so seldom true.

Then harbour no smile on your bonny³ face
 To win the deepest sigh.
 The fairest words on truest lips
 Pass on and surely die, 10
 And you will stand alone, my dear,
 When wintry winds draw nigh.

Sweet, never weep for what cannot be,
 For this God has not given.
 If the merest dream of love were true 15
 Then, sweet, we should be in heaven,
 And this is only earth, my dear,
 Where true love is not given.

Elizabeth Siddal (1829–1862)

³ *bonny*— pretty

2 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the novel *An Instant in the Wind* (published in 1976) by André Brink.

It is the year 1749. Elizabeth Larsson has been on an expedition into the South African bushland, during which her husband and all the others in the group have died or deserted, leaving her alone. She has been rescued by Adam Mantoor, a runaway slave.

She follows on his heels, struggling with the swaying shoots and the network of intertwined stems remaining behind him, occasionally crying out when a tough young sapling swings back, striking a red weal across her cheek or breast or shoulder. The smaller thorny shrubs leave a network of patches on their legs. Only their feet, protected by the shapeless skins he fashioned for them, remain unharmed. From time to time he stops to pick berries or fruit, showing it to her to test her skill and memory: this is edible, this is deadly poisonous, that is bitter. 5

Without warning they break through the final barrier of *fynbos*,¹ finding themselves in the high forest. The change is abrupt and shocking. Here is no sun, no tangled undergrowth; only the large heavy trunks of ancient trees, the earth covered with a rustling mat of rotten bark, leaves, crackling twigs, patches of ferns or moss. The silence is absolute, and unearthly. Whenever they stop, so that even the dull rustling sounds accompanying their progress die down, the silence becomes still more awesome, defined by the calls of birds, the scurrying of monkeys among the branches, the sudden high-pitched whistle of a bluebuck dashing off, or the flight of a bushbuck after a momentary glimpse of a brown-speckled body and a flashing white tail. 10 15

What amazes her is the clarity of everything. No deep gloom through the absence of the sun, but a luminous reality, as if the leaves themselves are glowing from within, as if earth and trees are manifestations of light. 20

Intuitively he finds his way to one of the countless game-paths crisscrossing through the forest, following it to a fern-covered stream in a maple thicket. There, spread over a distance of several hundred yards, he carefully sets up the six or seven snares they've brought along, camouflaging them with leaves and splinters of bark. 25

'What makes you think the buck would choose this one spot in the whole forest?' she asks, incredulous.

'Look at all the tracks. It's obvious they've chosen this for a drinking place,' he says. 'You'll see when we come back tomorrow.'

'Are we going home already?' she asks with open disappointment. 30

'Why not?'

A *lourie*² shrieks close by. Among the trees are bright blobs of red and orange and yellow fungus, there are orchids suspended from delicate stems. The earth is redolent with sweet decay, a gentle green stench. Large butterflies flutter among the leaves and flowers. Something is rustling in the foliage. Silence speaks to them in its innumerable voices. 35

'It is so peaceful here,' she says. 'I want to stay longer. Can't we go further?'

He leads her on, along the winding trail, through the green luminosity of the wood. She has lost all consciousness of time.

Once he stops in his tracks, clutching her hand, whispering: 'Elephants.' 40

'How can you tell?'

He shows her, with infinite patience: leaves plastered against a thick brown trunk, sap oozing from a broken root, branches torn off and tossed away, a cluster of wet, chewed leaves, a trampled fern – and, soon, fresh dung.

'But I can't see anything,' she objects. 'They must be far away.' 45

With a raised hand he silences her. 'No, they're very close. Step on the tracks.' He points to what she hasn't even noticed: the flattened round marks on the ground, where one may step without causing a twig to crackle or a leaf to whisper.

She still finds it difficult to believe him. But all of a sudden he grabs her wrist. She stops, gazing ahead, but seeing nothing she shakes her head. 50

At that moment a branch breaks like a cracking shot. Startled, she nearly cries out. The brief movement of the animal's trunk has suddenly revealed the entire brownish mass of its body, motionless among the trees.

'Is there only one?'

'No. Look over there.' 55

An ear twitching; a long tusk gashing white against the green. Now she sees the bull too. And, gradually, one after another, the whole herd feeding among the trees.

With a long detour he leads her past them, further into the forest. When she complains of fatigue he finds a pool of reddish-brown water in which to frolic and splash among the ferns. He gathers fruit she has never tasted. And after gorging themselves they lie down to rest a while and sleep. 60

¹ *fynbos*— thick shrubs

² *lourie*— a brightly-coloured bird

3 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the novel *A Grain of Wheat* (published in 1967) by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o.

Gikonyo is a carpenter and musician; Mumbi is a young woman. They both live in the Kenyan village of Thabai.

Feeling tired, he one day brought out his guitar and started to play. He had spent the morning and afternoon making furniture for a couple recently married. The man had promised to pay at the end of the month. Gikonyo liked his guitar. It was an old one, but he had paid quite a lot of money for it to the Indian trader.

He played softly, singing to himself, trying a new tune. Soon he was absorbed in his voice and playing, and the hardness began to leave his muscles. The sun was settling, the lengthened shadows of trees and houses were slowly merging. 5

Then the shavings rustled. Gikonyo started, and was a little embarrassed and excited at seeing Mumbi: she was working a piece of knitting tucked under her arm.

‘Why did you stop?’ she smiled. 10

‘Oh, I didn’t want you to hear my carpenter’s voice and see my hands destroying both the song and the strings.’

‘Is that why you never speak when you come to our place?’ There was a malicious twinkle in her eyes.

‘Don’t I?’ 15

‘You should know ... Anyway, I stood there all the time and heard you sing and play. It was good.’

‘My voice or hands?’

‘Both!’

‘How do you know whether my playing is good or bad? You never come to the dances on Sunday.’ 20

‘Aah, true I never do. But do you think all other men are as mean as you? Karanja often plays to me alone at home. I sit. I knit my pullover, he plays. He is a good player.’

‘He is a good player,’ Gikonyo agreed curtly. Mumbi did not notice Gikonyo swallowing something in his throat. For at that time her mood had changed from playfulness to seriousness. 25

‘But you also played – I never knew you could play so – and it was moving perhaps because you were playing to yourself,’ she said with a frankness that pleased Gikonyo. 30

‘Maybe sometimes I can play for you.’

‘Play now, please play it to me,’ she said eagerly. Gikonyo took this for a challenge, he feared strength would desert him.

‘Then you must sing as I play. Your voice is so nice,’ he said, and took the instrument. 35

But he found his hands were shaking. He strummed the strings a little, trying to steady himself. Mumbi waited for him to play the tune. As his confidence rose, Gikonyo felt Thabai come under his thumb. Mumbi’s voice sent a shudder down his back. His fingers and heart were full. So he groped, slowly, surely, in the dark, towards Mumbi. He struck, he appealed, he knew his heart fed power to his fingers. He felt light, almost gay. 40

And Mumbi’s voice trembled with passion as she weaved it round the vibrating strings. She felt the workshop, Thabai, earth, heaven, felt their unity. Then suddenly her heart was whipped up, she now rode on strange waves: alone defying the wind and the rain; alone fighting hunger and thirst in the desert; alone, struggling with strange demons in the forest, bringing glad tidings to her people. 45

The song ended. Gikonyo could almost touch the solid twilight calm.

‘How is it the country is so quiet and peaceful now?’ she asked.

‘It is always so before darkness falls.’

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