

Gitte Vest Barkholt and Jørgen Døssing Jepsen

# A Short History of Literature in English

A Handbook



SYSTIME >

# 6

## Post-Modernism

late 20<sup>th</sup> century till today

### Introduction

The word *Post-Modernism* means "after the Modernist movement" and was an area of academic study in the mid-1980s and still is. You may conclude that the old ideas about how man seeks knowledge have definitively been terminated at this point. Now there is no universal truth to guide man or society.

What Post-Modernism implies is difficult to explain as it appears in many different areas of study such as art, architecture, music, film, literature and sociology. The term Post-Modernism must not be confused with the term Post-Modernity, which has another focus: Post-Modernism is, as already mentioned, a cultural and intellectual phenomenon, whereas Post-Modernity as a term is used within sociology and political science to describe societies economically and culturally – mostly seen from a global point of view.

The Post-Modern writer focuses on expression without content, which means that the writer puts up a scenario which the reader is free to interpret in whatever way he wants to: there is no correct interpretation.

But while Post-Modernism seems very much like Modernism, it differs from Modernism in its attitude. Post-Modernism does not see the fragmented reality of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as necessarily bad but comments on its meaninglessness and plays with it.

Post-Modern literature is very experimental and every story is very different from the other. So it is very hard to point out some common

DEFINI. =  
ENDELIGT

TERMIN. =  
AFSLUTTET

UNIVERSAL  
TRUTH =  
UNIVERSEL  
SANDHED

IMPLIES =  
RUMMER

EXPRESSION =  
UDTRYK

CONTENT =  
INDHOLD

FRAGMENTED  
REALITY =  
FRAGMENTARIS-  
TET/ITUSLÆT  
VIRKELIG-  
HED

MEANING-  
LESSN. =  
MENINGS-  
LØSHED

EXPERIM. =  
EKSPERIMENTER-  
ENDE

characteristics. However, some of these are fragmentation, the use of paradoxes and the use of questionable narrators who are not to be trusted, which all make the stories very subjective.

Everyday situations are used in many novels, making it highly influenced by social realism. These novels are typically without any unnecessary information such as names, occupation, description of setting or supporting characters. This affects the reader's own relation to the text and challenges his imagination.

Furthermore, most Post-Modern writers do not use classical metaphors. Instead they make use of intertextuality when they want to make a point. This is e.g. done by imitating characteristics of earlier periods, mostly to make a parody of them. It is important to the writer that the reader realizes that it is actually a parody. So in this way the illusion of being original is also shattered. There is nothing new under the sun.

### Ideologies

In the beginning Post-Modernism was a reaction to Modernism. In the Post-Modern world there is no hierarchy or organizing principle within literature and art. This means that the artist or the writer does not feel obliged to follow the established rules of literature and art but instead plays with new forms resulting in extreme complexity, ambiguity as well as interconnectedness. Sometimes Post-Modernism may even appear as a parody of itself or a free-for-all buffet – or simply just words on a page.

Post-Modernists see the Western World as being outdated as it encourages meaningless bureaucracies and consumerism. It results in harming the resources and environment of the Earth, thereby giving way to various environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace and Earthwatch.

There is an individual perspective on anything. Truth is relative; it is up to you to decide what truth is, so anything goes. Post-Modernists are sceptical about traditional categorizations such as nationalism, capitalism, and religion. They would prefer a global non-political community with individual freedom and equality for everybody. This attitude is also found in the area of mass media and the tabloid press in particular, which most definitely present their own version of reality, a reality which to some may seem distorted and full of distrust.

QUESTIONABLE  
TVIVLSOM

SOCIAL REALISM =  
SOCIALREALISME

IMAGINATION  
FANTASI

INTERTEXTUALITY =  
INTELTEKSTUALITET

SHATTERED =  
SMADRET

OBLIGED =  
FORPLIGTET

COMPLEXITY =  
KOMPLEKSITET

INTERCONNECTEDNESS =  
FORBUNDENHED  
INDBYRDES

ENCOURAGES =  
OPMUNTRET  
TIL

BUREAUCRACIES =  
BUREAUKRATI

CONSUMERISM =  
FORBRUGELISME

VARIOUS =  
FORSKELLIGE

ENVIRONMENTALIST =  
MILJØ-

DISTORTED =  
FORVÆNGET

PSRO (2.6)

Charles Higson's short-story "The Red Line" (1993) describes such a fragmented and distorted world. The scene is the London Underground, where the reader follows four typically isolated Post-Modern characters who have four different angles on reality. Eventually, one of the characters, Berto, gets stabbed due to the xenophobic and hostile atmosphere of the place, which is emphasized by the red line of blood on the floor.

ANGLES =  
VINKUEL  
XENOPH =  
FREUMED  
FDEUSK

**Important historical events**

To sum up, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of the decline of Britain as a world power as her colonial empire disappeared. Although Britain was one of the winners of World War II, the country was also greatly weakened. It was a new situation in which Britain tried to join the other developed capitalist countries of Western Europe in the EEC (the forerunner of the EU), of which Britain became a member in 1973.

DECLINE =  
TILBAGE-  
GANG/  
FALD

The 1970s were led by the Labour Party and characterised by a wave of strikes on the labour market. The trade unions had grown very strong and the coal miners actually defeated the government through two strikes. The film *Brassed Off* (1996) shows the ups and downs of a brass band, where the brass band symbolizes what happens to the people of a mining society when the mine closes.

THE LAB-  
OUR MAR-  
ALBESOS-  
MARWED

RECAPTURE  
GENEROS  
RET

Unemployment and a high inflation made matters worse. Finally, a great part of the population grew tired of the situation and the government. In May 1979 the Conservatives won the general election and Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first female Prime Minister. The beginning of her period was difficult and the decline in the economy continued and peaked in 1982. However, the general atmosphere seemed to change in that year when Margaret Thatcher sent a task force because the Argentineans had invaded the Falkland Islands. The islands were recaptured by the British and national pride was restored. So was the economy.

RESTORED  
GENSWAST

SUBSTAN-  
TIAL =  
BETDCE-  
LIG

Throughout the decade unemployment and inflation fell steadily. Many people experienced a substantial rise in their living standards. Others were getting poorer, especially the increasing number of single parents whose state benefits were reduced.

STATE  
BENEFIT  
STATSSTA  
TE

REDUCED =  
NEPSAT

~~The Conservatives eventually got the better of the trade unions. A series of laws were passed that weakened their power and many state companies were sold and privatized. Moreover, there was a final~~

confrontation in 1984-1985 in which the coal miners and their leaders lost the strategic battle against the Conservative Government. That was the death of militant trade unionism in Britain.

The 1990s began with the introduction of the very unpopular poll tax, which was perhaps Margaret Thatcher's only serious mistake. In 1990 she was replaced by John Major and the Conservatives stayed in power until 1997 when Labour finally won and Tony Blair became Prime Minister. He modernized the ideas of socialism with substantial success and passed several welfare reforms. In 2007 he was replaced by Gordon Brown.

The world changed with the attack on America on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. From this date on terrorism has been on the world's agenda, also cruelly demonstrated by the terrorist acts in Madrid (2004), London (2005) and Mumbai (2008).

In March 2003 US Forces, backed by British army and coalitional forces, invaded Iraq with the aim of establishing a democratic government and removing Saddam Hussein as leader of Iraq. Although public opinion is becoming more and more against the intervention, British forces are still present in Iraq in 2010.

### Society

The society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has changed so fast that it is very difficult to define. However, it seems to have developed into a society of disillusionment and uncertainty. Nobody appears to know where they are going and this creates a variety of anxieties: pollution, the atomic bomb, diseases such as AIDS, the effects of global warming, just to mention a few.

Moreover, focus has changed from national to global. The world has turned into a huge melting pot of encountering cultures. People are constantly on the move, and every tiny village has become a global one.

"Progress" has moved from being something positive and necessary into being something negative and annoying. Science and rationality are useful, but not enough to improve the world.

The markets of the world are changing from mass production to specialized production. At the same time many multi-national companies grow and tend to become quite powerful and at some points they may even be on the verge of taking over the role of the State. The State no longer gives service as much as before because of growing

POLL TAX =  
EN SKAT ALLE  
(PÅNEK FATIGE  
OG HANDICAPPEDE,  
SKULDE BETALE  
FOR AT KUNNE  
STEMME. POLL =  
AFSTEMMING)

PASSED =  
GEMENSKABT

COALITIONAL =  
KOALITIONS-

DISILLUSIONMENT =  
DESILLUSIONERING →  
MISTEK SINE ILU-  
SIONER/SIN TRO

ANXIETIES =  
BEKYMNINGER

ENCOUNTERING =  
SAMMENSTØFFELSE  
(NOGET DEL MØDER  
~~NOGET~~ NOGET ANDET)

ON THE VERGE =  
PÅ NIPPET TIL AT

privatization in the public sector. Scepticism against this trend is exemplified in Doris Lessing's short-story "DHSS", in which both the social worker and the client feel stuck as there is no longer any trust in the system.

MANTRAS  
MANTRA-  
ER/  
COSTUME  
IDEE

In Post-Modern society people are less likely to be employed in the same job for many years. They go for new challenges and holding a job for more than five years may be seen as an unwillingness to be flexible. Being flexible is actually one of the mantras of the time, also mirrored in the way the daily work is organized. The division between being at work and being at home has become blurred as more and more people work at home during the week. A contemporary word for all this is flexicurity, a combination of the word "flexible" and "security".

BLURRED=  
SLORET/  
UDVISKET

Bearing all this in mind, we may conclude that it is very difficult to put a certain label on Post-Modern society.

Recent sociologists, such as Anthony Giddens, have used the term "late-Modernity" to describe our most recent time. By this Giddens indicates that we are not talking about *Post-Modernity*, yet.

### Man/Woman

Throughout the Post-Modern period the family pattern has changed drastically. The characteristics are uncertainty, insecurity and doubt, reflected in instability and increasing divorce rates and what seems to be the end of the traditional nuclear family.

NUCLEAR  
FAMILY=  
KEWE-  
FAMILIE

With the liberation of women and a higher percentage of women working outside the home a change of role has been inevitable. Mothers are no longer the only ones to take care of their children as professional child-minders have taken over while the mothers are working. Consequently, children are socialized more individually than before.

INEVITAB.  
UUNDGÆ-  
LIG

CHILD-MINDERS  
DAGPLEJE  
MEDIE

The new family pattern may take many shapes: The single-parent family, surrogate-mothers, gay and lesbian families, brought-together families as well as the traditional nuclear family.

BUSYNESS=  
TRAVLHED

Today, family life is characterized by busyness. Home is no longer where the hearth is as family members do things individually, often in their own room. The boundary between home and work is blurred, which has been further reinforced by the introduction of computers and the Internet. The idea of the global village has become reality. Post-Modern man has a huge amount of contacts outside the family by means of e-mail, text messaging, chat rooms and sites like Face-

book and MySpace. These contacts tend to create a sense of excitement, as well as a sense of fragmentation and chaos.

### Religion

The elements of fragmentation and chaos are also seen in people's choice of religion. All religions and non-religions are represented in the Post-Modern world. Some people are atheists or agnostics, while others follow more traditional religions, but being part of a global community everybody sees human life in a wider perspective.

### General characteristics in literature

To begin with, many of the elements of the Modernist period repeat themselves in Post-Modernism. Again, themes and techniques tend to blend and are often used together. The most used techniques will be described in the following paragraphs; however, this is not to be seen as an exclusive list of features as not all Post-Modern writers make use of all features.

One of the elements used is pastiche which means to combine or glue together various elements. It can be used as a celebration or a parody of former styles. It can also be a combination of multiple genres which are used to create a unique narrative. This is e.g. shown in Paul Auster's "City of Glass" (*The New York Trilogy*, 1985), in which detective fiction is mixed with metafiction and magic realism.

Some of the major characteristics of Post-Modern writers are playfulness and black humour, whereas Modernist writers had a more pessimistic outlook on life. This playfulness and black humour are also illustrated in "City of Glass" where the author takes his reader on a cruise through New York. The reader expects the story to have a goal; however, the reader is left with absolutely nothing in the end. Robert Altman's movie *Short Cuts* (1993), based on a number of Raymond Carver's short stories, takes the viewer on a kaleidoscopic journey around Los Angeles, where the lives of 22 characters are shown and interlinked, giving an impression of chance and chaos.

Another major element in Post-Modern fiction is the use of intertextuality. The element was originally introduced in Modernism and is based on the idea that texts never really stand isolated but tend to relate to one another. In this light you may say that there is nothing new under the sun. "City of Glass" is again a case in point. The reader

AGNOSTICS =  
AGNOSTIKER  
(DEN DEL MÅNEN  
AT EKSTISTENSEN  
AF GUD ER  
UMULIG AT BEVISE,  
DE AFVISEN DOG  
IKKE GUDS EKSTIS-  
TENS)

PASTICHE =  
— II —

is expected to be familiar with basic knowledge of the Bible as well as hard-boiled American crime fiction.

ULIG/MOSSAT  
"WASSER  
WRITING"  
-> HORROR

Just as in Modernism, metafiction is also used in Post-Modern writing. Metafiction is a way of commenting on the writing process and it creates an emotional distance to the reader thereby undermining the authority of the author. In "City of Glass" this is illustrated by the use of the red notebook and the writer himself, Paul Auster, receiving mysterious phone calls and at a point even interacting with the protagonist.

Historiographic metafiction is another form where historical events or figures are used directly in the story or are being fictionalized. In our present information age we are bombarded with information due to the widespread use of technology because we never really know what reality is. One might talk about the idea of hyperreality in which simulations have replaced the real world.

METAFIC-  
METAFIK-  
TION

UNDELMIN-  
UNDELMI-  
NEREL/  
UNDEL-  
GRAVEL

HYPERRE-  
ALITÄT

HYPERRE-  
ALITÄT

REPLACED  
ERSTATET

### Arts and Music

~~The Post-Modern features are also found in the music of the period. The transition from Modern to Post-Modern took place in the late 1960s, exemplified by Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967) by the Beatles in which different genres of music were surprisingly mixed. Thus, the Beatles became some of the forerunners of modern rock music. Today artists such as Nick Cave make use of intertextuality by blending electronic music with references to the Bible.~~

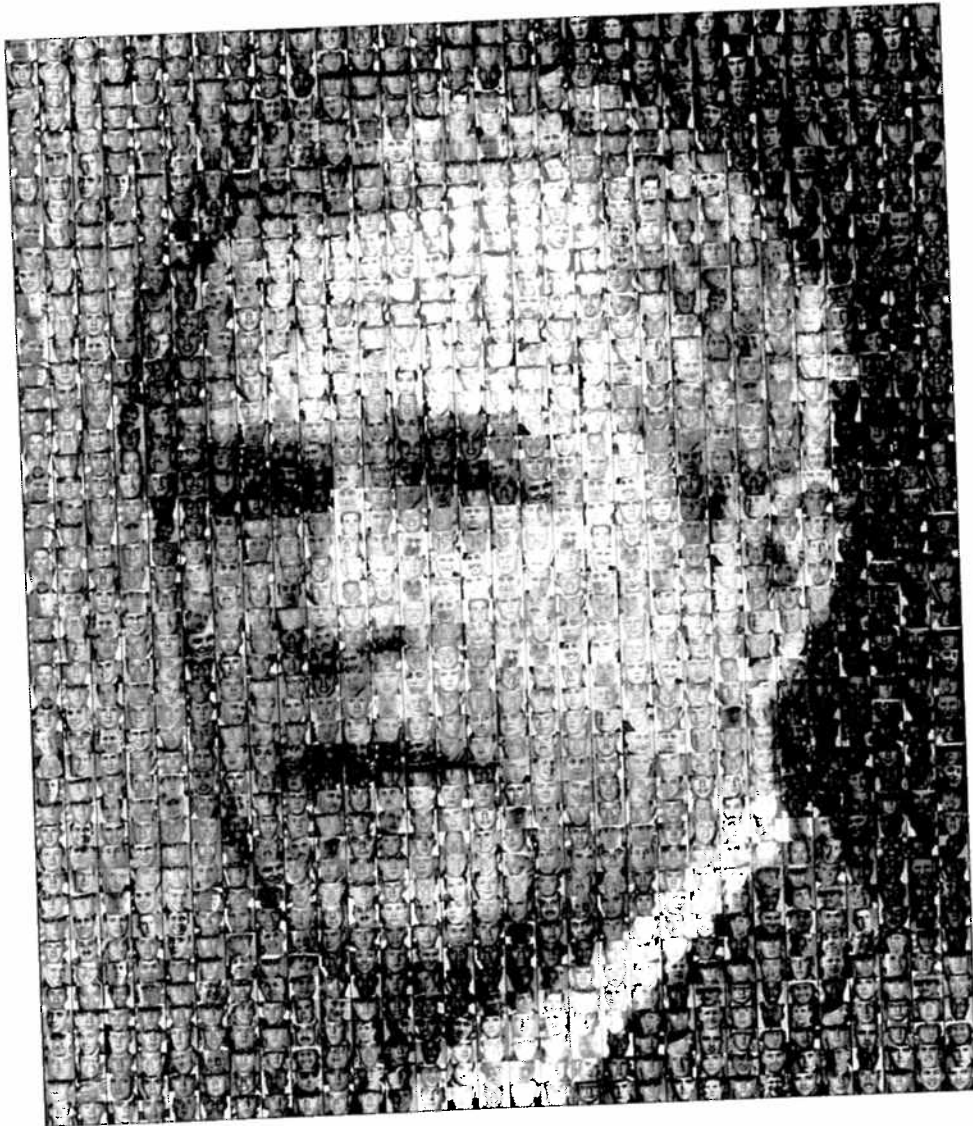
Modernism cherished the new and thought that ideas from the past were old-fashioned. Post-Modernism, however, borrows from the past and mixes a wide range of styles - a "pick and mix" approach. It goes against strict rules and takes the ideas very far as regards art and architecture. Among other things, the concept of space is redefined as is seen in the world of theatre where in principle anything may be performed anywhere.

CHELISHED  
VERDSAT-  
TE

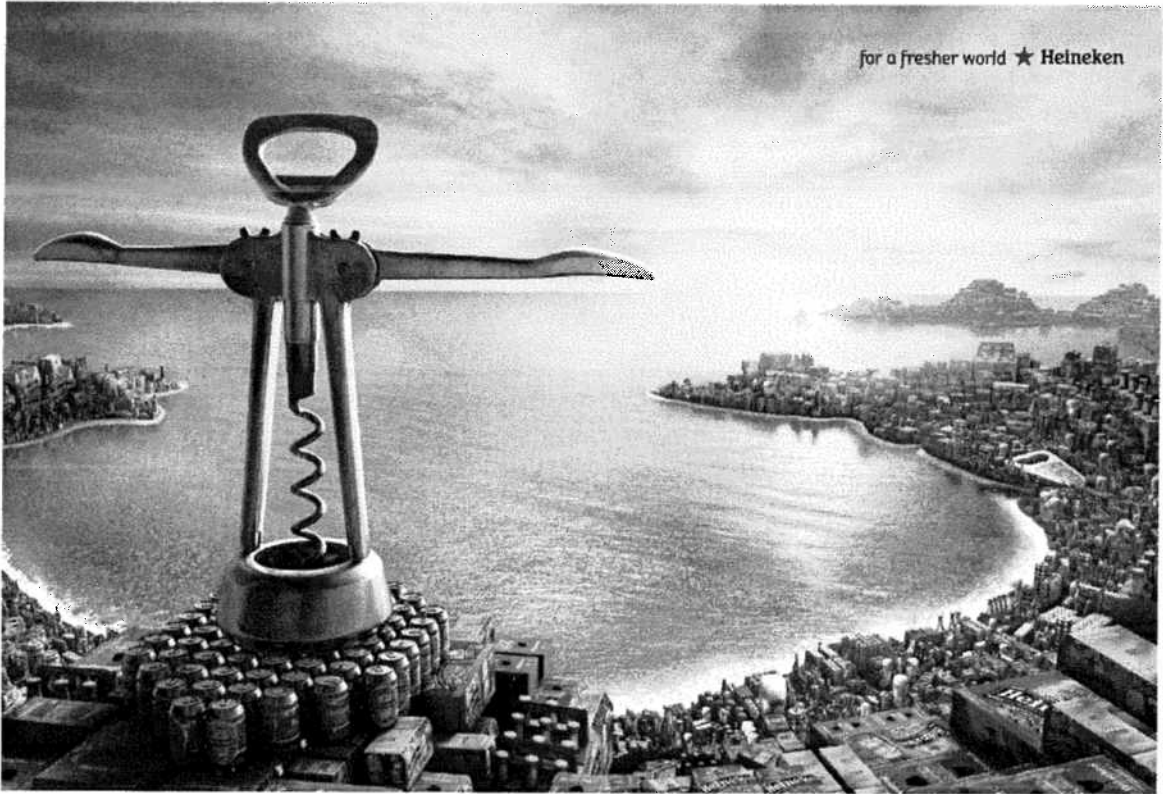
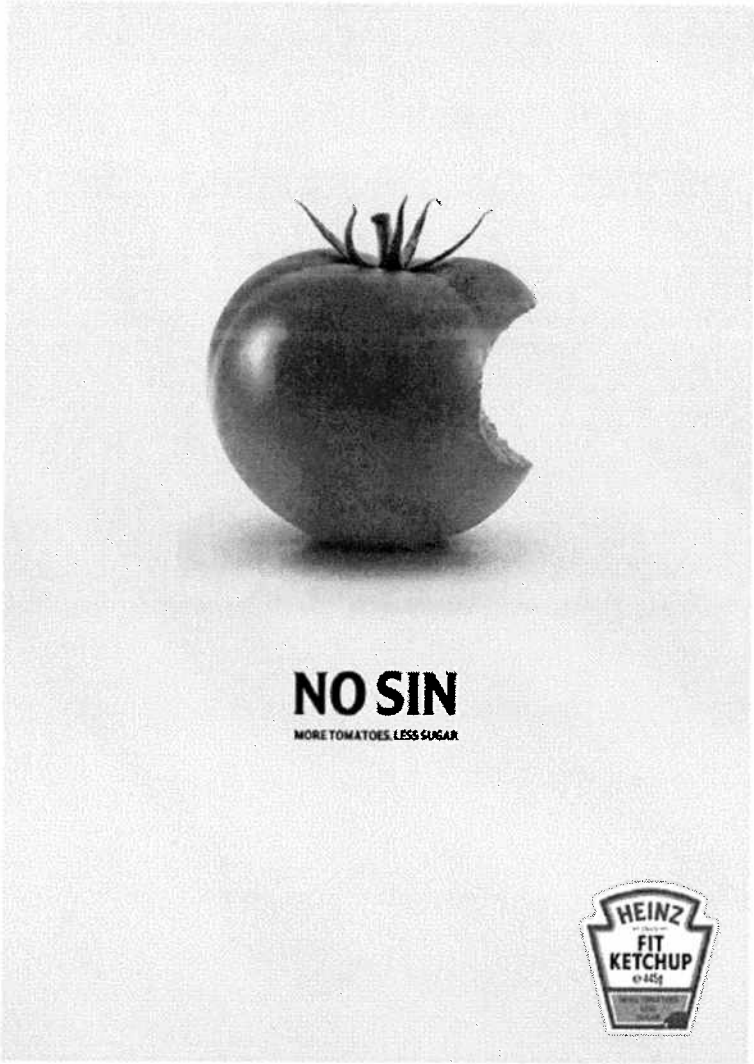
APPROACH  
TILGANG

An example of Post-Modern art is seen below where the blog artist "Joe" has made the picture of George W. Bush out of many small photos of American soldiers who have died in Iraq.

~~Post-Modern architecture can be seen as a reaction to Modernism. This is shown in the way buildings are designed with the use of ornamentation and a fusion of styles. A Modernist architect would tend to see a Post-Modern building as cheap and overdone. This is due to the different perceptions, where Modernism believes in minimal or absent~~



"Joe", War President, 2004



# The Red Line

by Charles Higson, 1993

## Oval

He had no body hair. Every Friday evening, standing naked before his full-length mirror, he made sure of it. His fingers stroked and probed his skin, and with tweezers, razor and depilatory cream he removed any offending growth. Clean armpits, no ugly squiggles on his chest, no pubic hair polluting his penis and testicles. His golden locks remained, of course, falling around his ears and across his forehead in tight and shining curls. Twice a day he washed his hair, so that it gleamed like precious metal. Once he was clean and smooth all over, he studied himself in the mirror, standing naked and translucent, glistening with baby oil. His skin, pure white and unblemished. His body, plump and rounded, fingernails clean, no mark or blemish anywhere. With his little pink bow of a mouth and his eyes the palest blue, the effect was quite beautiful.

Then he would dress to go out, delighting in the feel of his clothes against his sensitive skin. The creamy luxury of his black silk shirt, the smooth slipperiness of nylon underpants. Then he would put on his white trousers, the evening jacket he'd found in a charity shop, and finally his little red shiny shoes. He was proud of his small feet and hands, they were so dainty and delicate.

Friday night was the highlight of his week. Friday night was karaoke night at The Brunswick. And he was the best. Nobody could touch him, because he was a professional, dedicated, in a different league to the others. He had routine. He'd worked at

it, studied videos to get the moves just right. He was always one of the first up: when the others were still shy and self-conscious he would strut over to the mike knowing that nobody else that evening would be able to come near him. He set the standard against which everyone else was judged. He wasn't just some half-arsed drunk showing off, having a lark. When he went up he was the man himself: he was Bob Seger, the greatest rock singer who had ever lived. When he sang "We've Got Tonight" and he moved just like Bob, every nuance, every gesture perfect, he was aware of the whole pub looking at him in silent awe. And when he finished there would be a thunder of applause, cheers, whistles, shouts of "Encore!", happy laughter. They loved him. They knew that they had seen perfection.

Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band: the very name conjured up such glamorous images. He dreamt that one day he might go on television, do his routine and win a big prize, enough money to be able to afford to go to America, maybe even visit where Bob lived. At least, that was what he had once thought. Now everything was changed. Everything. Why couldn't people just leave things alone, instead of wanting to change, change, change all the time? He thought about it now, as he sat on the noisy, rattling tube train. Remembered the night he'd gone to the pub and the karaoke machine was gone.

## Embankment

Berto looked up at the Underground map for what seemed like the hundredth time, and still it made no sense to him. Where was Hackney? The map was a jumble of confusing names. The English language seemed to have no rules. Names didn't sound like they were written. That had been made clear to him after Cathy had left the train and he'd tried to ask a man for help. He hadn't been able to make himself understood and in the end the man had simply laughed and shook his head. It had been humiliating. He hadn't found the courage to ask again. Now he was lost, but he wasn't going to let himself get scared. As long as he was moving it was OK... If he just sat there on this train,

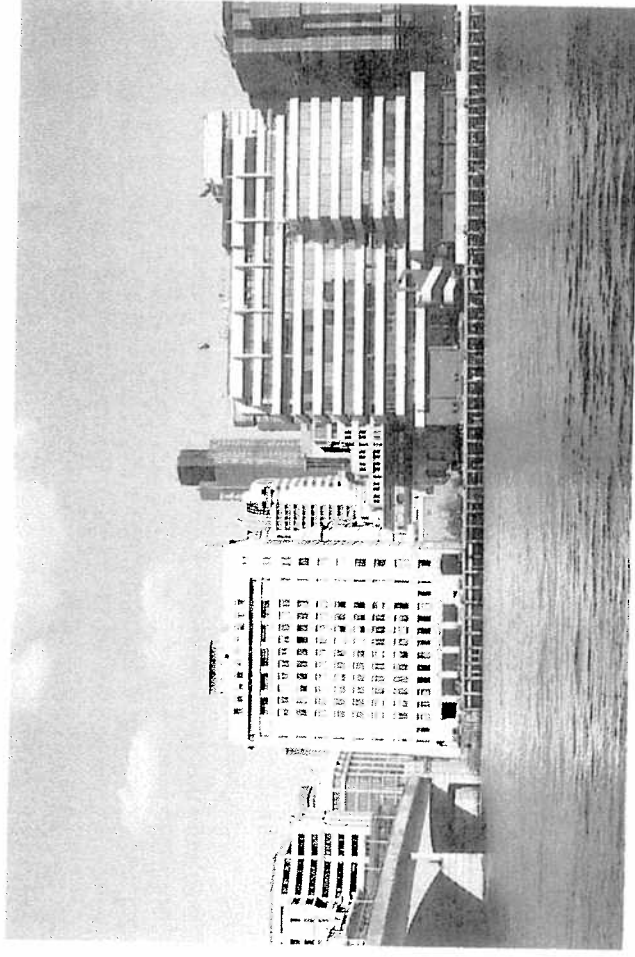
in this warm carriage, he would eventually work out what to do. As long as he acted sensibly and didn't panic, things would work out.

5 But London was vast and confusing. Not like Venice. In Venice, when he'd met Cathy, everything had seemed clear and easy. Even though they hadn't been able to talk they had understood each other, and as they'd spent most of their time in bed, talking hadn't been important. So he'd come to England, like she'd said he should ... Only it wasn't what he'd expected. For one thing, she had a boyfriend. She hadn't told him that before. She'd tried to talk to him about the boyfriend yesterday in the taxi, on the way to her place from the station, but he wasn't sure he understood. She'd told him about something called a "trial separation" and an "open relationship", and even though he looked the words up, he still didn't understand what they meant. So he nodded and went along with it. To him it all seemed crazy.

She still saw the boyfriend. Last night, his first night in England, they had all had dinner together. Afterwards the boyfriend had kissed Cathy goodnight and gone home. Berto had gone to bed with Cathy and they had started to make love but he could tell that she was tense, that she didn't really want to do it, so he had stopped. All those miles, thinking about her, and now this. If only he'd been able to talk to her about it.

25 Today had been even stranger. Cathy had been at work, so the boyfriend had shown him around London. Trying very hard to be friendly, telling him about everything they saw, too fast for Berto to understand. That was when Berto realized just how big the city was, how spread out. You couldn't walk, always it had to be buses and what the English called the tubes. So he had no sense of the layout, no internal map.

Berto had only spoken once all day and the boyfriend had laughed at him. They were by the river where there were some imposing concrete buildings; a theatre and a cinema and an art gallery. On a grand scale, as if built from giant slabs. It was very simple, grey and unfussy, and Berto had said how much he liked it, how he wished there could be something in Venice like this instead of all those old buildings which all looked the same



Office buildings in the City on the site of the Great Fire commemorated by the Monument (the column with the golden flame on top was designed by Christopher Wren). What the fire only partly succeeded in doing, namely pushing inhabitants out of the City, has been completed by corporations and financial institutions with their offices. To the left is Adelaide House, 1924-5, a solid block with little ornament and a vertical emphasis. The style is slightly Egyptian but moving on to Modernism. To the right is Magnus House, 1977, which is elegant Modernism with its horizontal bands of glass and slabs. Above the Monument rises the National Westminster Tower, called Nat West. Erected in 1981 it stands as a reminder of the rational and undecorative ideology of Modernism. (View from St. Martin's Walk between London Bridge and Tower Bridge)

and were falling down. The boyfriend thought this was funny, and Berto supposed he hadn't said it right. He didn't bother trying to say anything after that, he left the boyfriend to it, jabbering on and on.

5 They had stayed out all day, then met Cathy in a Chinese restaurant. Afterwards they had gone to a party somewhere called Clapham. He hadn't enjoyed the party. Cathy had ignored him, spent the whole time with the boyfriend. Everyone had got drunk, shouting and laughing. He could talk to nobody.

He sat on the stairs by himself and people pushed past him all the time as if he didn't exist. He had begun to wonder what he was doing in this country.

Luckily, Cathy wanted to leave early, and luckily the boyfriend didn't come with them. But Cathy hadn't been happy. She said she had had an argument with the boyfriend. Berto tried to talk about this but she only became more upset. They had got on the tube, and Berto had said something which made Cathy angry, he had no idea what. She'd shouted at him – too fast, too many words he didn't understand – and at the next stop she got off the train, swore at him (the few words he did understand) and told him not to follow. And like a fool he didn't.

### Leicester Square

No more karaoke the barman had said. Karaoke was last year's thing, there wasn't any interest in it any more. Friday night was Dance Night at The Brunswick now. A DJ sat at the back, where the karaoke machine had been, and played endless bang-bang music. *Bang, bang, bang, tss, tss, tss*. All bleeps and funny voices. It was disgusting, and nobody danced, anyway. The pub just filled up with drunks, drug addicts, girls with dirty hair. He hated these people. Desperate, he'd searched for another pub. He found one with a machine not far away, in Stockwell, but they had no Bob Seger. No "We've Got Tonite" not even "Hollywood Nights". It was all Elvis and black disco music. He searched all of South London, but everywhere it was the same. People didn't care about Bob Seger any more.

He took to staying in, standing in front of the mirror for hours on end, shaving and looking at his reflection. He would light candles and with the rest of the room in darkness, he was the most wonderful thing you could imagine. But when he looked out of the window he would see people. Ugly people. Dirty, hairy people. People who didn't know about Bob Seger, or his own perfect karaoke routine. And he knew he had to do something about it. He had to do something about the stubble which was spreading all over London.

### Goodge Street

Berto knew he would be OK if he kept moving and didn't panic. But the map above his head, which before had seemed so clear and neat and pretty, now made no sense at all. He looked at it and looked at it but he couldn't find Hackney, where Cathy lived. He still had her address written down on his little crumpled piece of paper. He studied it again, as if it might hold some clue, but it was useless, because he couldn't even find Hackney on the map. He'd tried following each line, from one end to the other; the blue, the silver, the green, the yellow, the black he was travelling along. But they went on forever, and they got tangled in the middle and they branched and twisted, and he got lost and confused.

They stopped at another station, Goodge Street, in the middle of the map. Berto wondered if he should get off and ask someone. But he felt safe in the carriage, it was like a capsule, an air bubble, bouncing around London. He didn't want the bubble to burst. The doors closed and they were off again, jostling through the darkness.

He knew he had once more to try to talk to someone. That would be the best way. But how? People never understood what he said, maybe he would be laughed at again. He felt very small and foolish. He searched the other passengers for a friendly face. There was an old woman, sniffing and staring vacantly into space. Old people were no use, they were all deaf. The middle-aged man then? He was a bit scruffy, asleep, his head lolling on his shoulder. He was drunk. Drunks were the worst.

Berto looked at his watch: it was nearly half-past twelve. He had to do something. What about the young woman, then? Women were usually more sympathetic than men, weren't they? She looked a bit like Cathy. A typical English girl, with a fresh, pretty, open face. Yes, he could ask her ... Or the man next to her, perhaps? Dressed funny – all English men dressed funny. He had a plastic bag in his lap, like so many people seemed to carry with them, here. He looked the friendly sort. With curly hair, a face like a cherub from a painting. So many cherubs in Venice. So many old paintings. Why was he here?

He steeled himself. Go on, Berto, ask the woman ... But then his eyes caught hers and she looked away embarrassed. A man shouldn't be like this, helpless. He cursed as the train once more shuddered to a halt. OK, he told himself, before the next stop, then. He would ask her before the next stop.

### Euston

Denise looked at the floor; she looked at the torn seat next to her; she looked up at the adverts on the other side. Where did you look on a tube? Anywhere but where was natural, where was comfortable. Anything to avoid looking at someone else. But how did you stop people looking at you? There – he'd done it again. He'd eyed her up. Jesus! Why had she got on the tube alone? Why hadn't she got a taxi like usual? So she'd saved herself a few pounds, but it wasn't worth it. London wasn't safe for a single woman. Don't look at anyone. Don't talk to anyone.

He was dark-skinned, the man, with thick black hair. Dark eyes. A bit like some of the male models in the Next catalogue. In other circumstances she might have found him attractive. But she knew well enough that rapists weren't all ugly or fat. Every man was a potential rapist. Every time you left your flat you were a potential victim. Every day in the papers there were more reports. Every day on the crime programmes another innocent woman was assaulted. Magazine articles, posters, films, *Woman's Hour*, they all told you the same thing. The city was out to get you.

She laughed sourly to herself when she thought of the taxi option. Just the other day she'd read about a taxi driver who'd attacked a string of girls. She'd tried talking to Neil about her fears, but as usual, he'd been completely unsympathetic. He'd even tried to claim that it was men who were most at risk of assault in London, not women. That was typical of a man. He'd trotted out some statistic, but she wasn't going to be drawn into a stupid male argument about maths. She'd told them about it at the women's group tonight and they'd all laughed, told her once again she should ditch Neil. She frowned. That would be

the last women's group she went to in south London. It wasn't worth the risk of travelling back alone late at night.

Oh, God, he was looking at her again, with that look all men had. The look of a hunter. Cold, superior, in charge. He was looking at her naked. If only she had something to read, a book to hide in.

Camden Town. Half the carriage emptied. There were only four of them left now, including Denise. The dark-faced man, the man with the blond curly hair, and down the other end a young bloke with glasses, too far away to be any help. Shit, it was four more stops to East Finchley. She looked at the curly-haired man, willing him to look round. At last he did and she gave him a friendly smile. But he looked soft, like a child. What use would he be if anything happened?

That was it. Never use public transport again. She had to get her own car. But then there were car thieves, crashes, men in vans swearing at you, those horrible hyenas in the TV ads ... Maybe she should just move back to Nottingham and have done with it.

### Tufnell Park

They were both sneering at him now. So bloody superior. So fucking smug. The girl had actually turned round and jeered at him. He'd seen them eyeing each other up across the aisle. They thought they were so clever, didn't they. Thought they owned the place. The snotty girl and the other one, the dirty-looking man. Who the fuck did he think he was, the greasy ape? Look at him. He was just the type who was ruining London. Just the type who went to discos and clubs – a drug taker, a hooligan. He was covered in hair, he had black stubble on his cheeks, thick curls crawled out of the top of his T-shirt, even his hands were hairy. It was disgusting. It made him feel sick. He shivered and goose-pimples spread down his arms and back.

Now look at him, putting on some of those little headphone things. He could imagine the music – black music. Bang, bang, bang. The sort of music they played next door and kept him awake all night. *Tss, tss, tss, bang, bang, bang*. Somebody had

## Archway

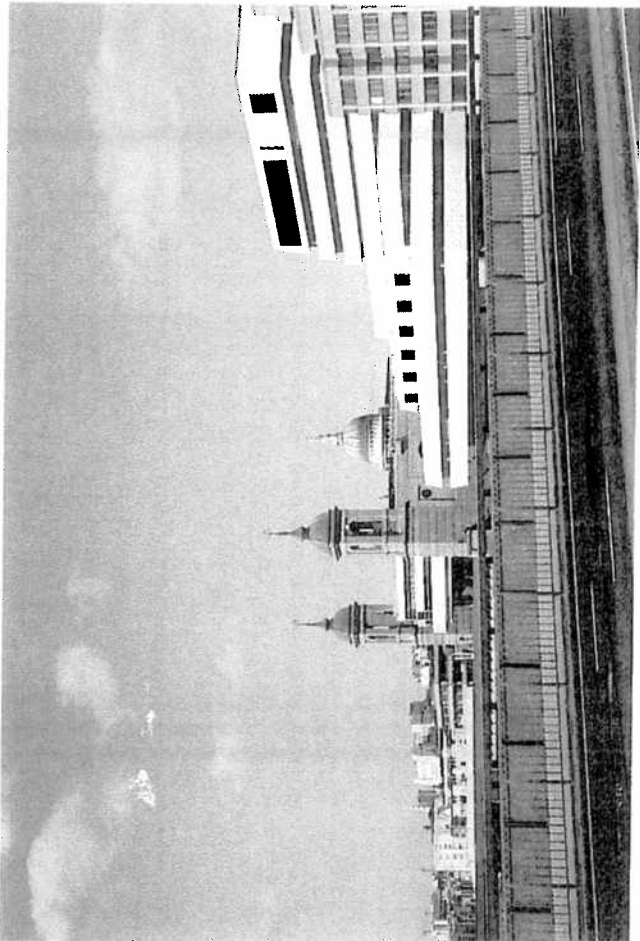
It was comforting to hear an Italian voice, even if it was trying to teach him English. He didn't know why he'd bought the cassette, he'd had it two months and had learnt nothing. There was nothing on the tape to tell him how to find Hackney on the tube. Nothing to tell him how to deal with a crazy English girl with a boyfriend in an "open relationship". Nothing to give him the courage to ask someone for help. He knew he would have to soon. The black line on the map just went up and up, finishing somewhere called High Barnet. There he would have to turn and come back again. He couldn't spend the rest of the night travelling up and down the line, like some wandering lost soul. He'd told himself he'd ask the girl by the next stop. But the station had come and gone, and the one after. Stupid, stupid. He had to do something. He had to act like a grown man. He took off the headphones just as the voice was telling him how to buy a loaf of bread.

## Highgate

Oh, God. He was leaning forwards. Leaning towards her. He'd deliberately taken off his Walkman and he was going to talk to her. You don't talk to anyone on the tube. Unless ... Oh, God. She jumped up and went to stand by the doors.

Come on, station. It wasn't East Finchley, she'd have to wait for the next train, but she had to do something to get away from this man. Now he was standing, too. She could see his reflection distorted in the doors. He was coming over to her. She shouldn't have moved. She was too far from the curly-haired man in the red shoes. Past the glass wall. Out in the open.

Then the lights. The wall rushing past gave way to a platform, posters, lights, the Underground logo, Highgate. The train slowed and stopped, the doors slid open and she was off and running. Don't look back. There was the yellow exit sign. Don't look back. The platform was deserted. She couldn't hear anything behind her, but he was wearing trainers, wasn't he? He could move silently. She passed a poster of a woman, *Hennes*, with a moustache drawn on her face and an obscene mes-



mondial House, 1973, office building in the City. The lesson learnt from Modernism in its many forms was that architecture could spoil a skyline or a street if considerations were not taken to incorporate existing styles into the new buildings. Mondial House is an example of a mismatch of form, texture and colour. Cannon Street Station, 1866, which lies to the left, is dwarfed and pillaged by the computer appearance of Mondial House as is the dome of St. Paul's. Mondial House is one of Prince Charles's chief aversions. He scolds it for being inhuman and not signalling what it is, an office building. (London Bridge)

to do something about these people. These spoilers who were ruining London. Well, that was why he was here, wasn't it? That was why he'd been riding the Underground all day with his Travelcard. Just like he used to when he visited Auntie Gwen in Chiswick.

He was ready. He hoped his tape was strong enough. It should be, he'd practised with it in the kitchen till he was sure he had it right. He was impatient to try it out, but he had to wait. There were too many people, still. He would wait, though. This was all that mattered now.

*Tss, tss, bang, bang.*

sage. The whole station seemed deserted, just like that scene in *An American Werewolf in London*. The escalator was endless. She ran up it, two steps at a time. Don't look back. Try not to think about what was behind her. At last she was up. Ahead she could see the ticket collector in his glass box, and she could stand it no more. She had to know. She turned. She was alone. He hadn't followed her.

She smiled and let out her breath. Her quick thinking had saved her life. All she had to do now was get the next train to Highgate.

She turned towards the down-escalator and then a thought struck her. What if there was a man on the platform? What if she had to wait there with him? At this time of night it might be ages till the next train. She pictured her dead body, lying there abandoned, with a moustache drawn on it. But she couldn't leave the Underground here. It was too far to walk to East Finchley. It was dark outside. Taxis weren't safe. Nowhere was safe. A plane could fall out of the sky. She could be blown apart by the IRA. The escalator could burst into flames. The ticket collector could be a rapist ...

She stood there at the top of the stairs, unable to move. Whatever she did was sure to be a mistake. She began to shake, then tears ran down her face. She couldn't do anything. She was stuck here. Everything was broken down. *Jesus Christ, Denise*, she said to herself. *It's finally happened. You've lost it.*

### *East Finchley*

The dirty bricks of the tunnel wall sped past in a dark smear. He should have followed her. Should have got off this damned train to nowhere and sorted himself out. He looked down the carriage at the man in glasses at the other end. He was reading a book. He had built a wall about himself. So it had to be the other one, the cherub. Why was he ashamed to ask a man for help? He was a stranger here. Why should he be expected to know his way around?

He turned and walked towards the cherub. And he took it as a good sign when the curly-haired man stood up as well; rose

from his seat and came to meet him. Berto noticed he was carrying his plastic bag in a funny way, with his hand down inside it, gripping the sides rather than the handles. But he thought nothing of it.

Berto smiled. "*Scusi*." And in one quick movement, before Berto knew what was happening, the man took his hand out of the bag and punched him three times in the chest. Berto fell back against the seats, winded. In the half-second before the cherub put his hand back in the bag, Berto saw that he had a kitchen knife taped to his wrist, with four inches of blade sticking out. In panic Berto gasped and sucked in air. His lungs were full of liquid.

With no expression, and without a word, the cherub walked past him to the doors. Berto felt his shirt, it was soaked. He saw that he was covered in blood. He looked down at the young man at the other end, still reading his book. Berto cried out for help, but he didn't know the right words, the English words, and his voice was feeble.

They came to a station and the cherub casually got off the train. Berto tried to get up, but couldn't move. Something ripped inside him. He coughed and sticky, red gloop spattered on the floor. He cried out again, but saw the other man rise and leave the train, too. He was alone. With a last effort he wrenched himself from the seat, but the doors slid closed before he could reach them, and the train was moving once again.

He fell to the floor and lay there watching a trickle of his blood edge across the floor. It reminded him of something. And then he remembered. Of course: the red line – from left to right – the red line on the map. At last it was clear. He'd been shown the way. Follow the red line to the east, there was the station, Bethnal Green. The boyfriend had told him and he hadn't understood at the time. Now he did. Bethnal Green for Hackney. No station where Cathy lived. Follow the red line.

He heard the sound of the train through the floor. *Tss, tss, bang, bang*. He had a map, now. All he had to do was follow the red line as it slowly made its way across the carriage floor.

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**Kid**

Batman, big shot, when you gave the order to grow up,  
then let me loose to wander  
leeward, freely through the wild blue yonder  
as you liked to say, or ditched me, rather,  
in the gutter ... well, I turned the corner.  
Now I've scotched that "he was like a father  
to me" rumour, sacked it, blown the cover  
on that "he was like an elder brother"  
story, let the cat out on that caper  
with the married woman, how you took her  
downtown on expenses in the motor.  
Holy robin-redbreast-nest-egg-shocker!  
Holy roll-me-over-in-the-clover,  
I'm not playing ball boy any longer  
Batman, now I've doffed that off-the-shoulder  
Sherwood-Forest-green and scarlet number  
for a pair of jeans and crew-neck jumper;  
now I'm taller, harder, stronger, older.  
Batman, it makes a marvellous picture:  
you without a shadow, stewing over  
chicken giblets in the pressure cooker  
next to nothing in the walk-in larder,  
punching the palm of your hand all winter,  
you baby, now I'm the real boy wonder.

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BY SIMON ARMITAGE, 1992

IN "HIGHLIGHTS OF LITERATURE  
IN ENGLISH, A TEXTBOOK"

Gitte Vest Barkholt and Jørgen Døssing Jepsen

# Highlights of Literature in English

A Textbook



SYSTIME >



# Interflora

by Susan Hamlyn

1 From Robert B. @ mailexcite dot com  
 To E.B.B. @ virgin dot uk:  
 Please find herewith a proof of my esteem  
 a customized, fresh, virtual bouquet.  
 5 For scent please click on cellophane and press  
*Control*. To read the message on the tag  
 highlight the print, click on *Encrypt Reverse*.  
 To unwrap blooms and place in vase use *Drag*.  
 My flowers sent, beloved, in this way,  
 10 won't fade, stink of mortality's decay.  
 Petals won't wilt to husks nor leaves to slime;  
 these on-line flowers for you will outlast Time.  
 But if, my love, this gift seems incomplete  
 and does not touch your heart, then press *Delete*.  
 (2002)

e'steem	højagtelse
customize	specialfremstille
scent	duft
tag	etiket
en'crypt	skriv i kode
bloom	blomst
drag	trække; her: trække med musen
de'cay	forfald
petal	kronblad
wilt	visne
husk	"rest"

## I. Analysis

1. What is the poem about?
2. Comment on the structure of the poem.
3. Comment on the style of the poem: Characterize the language. Why are some words capitalized?
4. Comment on "My flowers sent, beloved, in this way, / won't fade, stink of mortality's decay."
5. Comment on the title.
6. What are the themes?
7. Compare "Interflora" with William Shakespeare's sonnet "Sonnet 18" ("Shall I compare the ...", cf. *A Short History of Literature in English*, p.21)

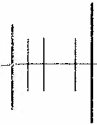
SKREVET M. STORE BOGSTAVEN

**II. Typical Post-Modern characteristics**

Find Post-Modern characteristics in the text.

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# East Wind

by Julian Barnes

111 sider

1 The previous November, a row of wooden beach huts, their  
 paintwork lifted and flaked by the hard east wind, had  
 burned to the ground. The fire brigade came from twelve  
 miles away, and had nothing to do by the time it arrived.  
 5 "YOBS ON RAMPAGE," the local paper decided, though no  
 culprit was ever found. An architect from a more fashion-  
 able part of the coastline told the regional TV news that the  
 huts had been part of the town's social heritage and must  
 be rebuilt. The council announced that it would consider all  
 10 options, but since then had done nothing.

Vernon had moved to the town only a few months before,  
 and had no feelings about the beach huts. If anything, their  
 disappearance improved the view from the Right Plaice,  
 where he sometimes had lunch. From a window table, he  
 15 now looked out across a strip of concrete to damp shingle,  
 a bored sky, and a lifeless sea. That was the east coast: for  
 months on end you got bits of bad weather and lots of no  
 weather. This was fine by him: he'd moved here to have no  
 weather in his life.

20 "You are done?"

He didn't look up at the waitress. "All the way from the  
 Urals," he said, still gazing at the long, flat sea.

"Pardon?"

25 "Nothing between here and the Urals. That's where the  
 wind comes from. Nothing to stop it. Straight across all  
 those countries." Cold enough to freeze your knob off, he  
 might have added in other circumstances.

30 "Oorals," she repeated. As he caught the accent, he  
 looked up at her. A broad face, streaked hair, chunky body,  
 and not doing any waitresy number in hope of a bigger tip.

yob	bølle
on rampage	gå grassat
culprit	gerningsmand
heritage	arv
council	byråd
shingle	småsten
the Urals	bjergkæde i det vestlige Rusland
knob	"tisseren"
streaked	med lyse striber
chunky	tyk

rabbit warren	rotterede
grand	£1000
spiraling	hastigt stigende
bottom out	nå bunden

Must be one of those Eastern Europeans who were all over  
the country nowadays. Building trade, pubs and restaur-  
ants, fruit picking. Came over here in vans and coaches,  
lived in rabbit warrens, made themselves a bit of money.  
Some stayed; some went home. Vernon didn't mind one  
way or the other. That's what he found more often than not  
these days: he didn't mind one way or the other.

"Are you from one of them?"

"One of what?"

"One of those countries. Between here and the Urals."

"Oorals. Yes, perhaps."

That was an odd answer, he thought. Or maybe her sense  
of geography wasn't so strong.

"Fancy a swim?"

"A swim?"

"Yes, you know. Swim. Splash splash, front crawl, breast-  
stroke."

"No swim."

"Fine," he said. He hadn't meant it, anyway. "Bill, please."

As he waited, he looked back across the damp concrete  
to the shingle. A beach hut had recently sold for twenty  
grand. Or was it thirty? Somewhere down on the south  
coast. Spiralling house prices, the market going mad:  
that's what the papers said. Not that it touched this part  
of the country, or the property he dealt in. The market had  
bottomed out here long ago, the graph as horizontal as the  
sea. Old people died, and you sold their flats and houses to  
people who would get old in them in their turn, and then  
die. That was a lot of his trade. The town wasn't fashion-  
able, never had been. Londoners carried on up the A12 to  
somewhere pricier. Fine by him. He'd lived in London all  
his life until the divorce. Now he had a quiet job, a rented  
flat, and saw the kids every other weekend. When they got  
older, they'd probably be bored with this place and start  
acting the little snobs. But for the moment they liked the  
sea, throwing pebbles into it, eating chips.

When she brought the bill, he said, "We could run away  
together and live in a beach hut."



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1 "I do not think," she replied, shaking her head, as if she believed he meant it. Oh, well, the old English sense of humor – takes a while for people to get used to it.

5 He had a few rentals to attend to – changes of tenancy, redecoration, damp problems – and then a sale up the coast, so he didn't return to the Right Plaice for a few weeks. He ate his haddock and mushies, and read the paper. There was some town in Lincolnshire that was suddenly half Polish, there'd been so many immigrants. Nowadays, more Catholics went to church on Sundays than Anglicans, they were saying, what with all these Eastern Europeans. He didn't mind one way or the other. Actually, he liked the Poles he'd met – brickies, plasterers, electricians. Good workers, well trained, did what they said they would, trustworthy. It was time the good old British building trade had a kick up the arse, Vernon thought.

The sun was out that day, slanting low across the sea, annoying his eyes. Late March, and bits of spring were getting even to this part of the coast.

20 "How about that swim, then?" he asked as she brought the bill.

"Oh, no. No swim."

"I'm guessing you might be Polish."

"My name is Andrea," she replied.

25 "Not that I mind whether you're Polish or not."

"I do not also."

30 The thing was, he'd never been much good at flirting – never quite said the right thing. And since the divorce he'd got worse at it, if that was possible, because his heart wasn't in it. Where was his heart? Question for another day. Today's subject: flirting. He knew all too well the look in a woman's eye when you didn't get it right. Where's he coming from, the look said. Anyway, it took two to flirt. And maybe he was getting too old for it. Thirty-seven, father of two, Gary, eight, and Melanie, five. That's how the papers would put it if he was washed up on the coast some morning.

rental udlejning  
tenancy lejemål  
haddock kuller (fisk)  
mushy champignon  
Anglican anglikaner  
(som tilhører den engelske statskirke)  
bricky murer  
plasterer stukkator  
slanting slow  
med lav hældning

hamper	besværliggøre
sturdy	robust
Goth	medlem af subkultur, der bærer sort tøj og sminke
loiter	hænge ud
pushy	have for travlt
gabby	snakkesalig

"I'm an estate agent," he said. That was another line that  
often hampered flirting. 1

"What is this?"

"I buy and sell houses. And flats. And we do rentals.  
Rooms, flats, houses." 5

"Is it interesting?"

"It's a living."

"We all need living."

He suddenly thought, No, you can't flirt, either. Maybe  
you can flirt in your own language, but you can't do it in  
English, so we're even. He also thought, She looks sturdy. 10  
Maybe I need someone sturdy. She might be my age, for all  
I know. Not that he minded one way or the other. He wasn't  
going to ask her out.

He asked her out. There was little enough choice of "out" 15  
in this town. One cinema, a few pubs, and the couple of  
restaurants where she didn't work. Apart from that, there  
was bingo for the old people whose flats he would sell when  
they were dead, and a club where some halfhearted Goths  
loitered. Kids drove into Colchester on a Friday night and 20  
bought enough drugs to see them through the weekend. No  
wonder they'd burned down the beach huts.

He liked her at first for what she wasn't. She wasn't  
flirty; she wasn't gabby; she wasn't pushy. She didn't mind 25  
that he was an estate agent, or that he was divorced with  
two kids. Other women had taken a quick look and said no.  
He reckoned women were more attracted to men who were  
still in their marriages, however fucked up those marriages  
were, than to ones who were picking up the pieces after-  
ward. Not surprising, really. But Andrea didn't mind all that. 30  
Didn't ask questions much. Didn't answer them, either, for  
that matter. The first time they kissed, he thought of asking  
if she was really Polish, but then he forgot.

He suggested coming back with him, but she refused. 35  
She said she'd come the next time. He spent an anxious  
few days wondering what it would be like to go to bed with  
someone new after so long. He drove fifteen miles up the  
coast to buy condoms where no one knew him. Not that



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1 he was ashamed or embarrassed; just didn't want anyone knowing, or guessing, his business.  
"This is a nice apartment."  
"Well, if an estate agent can't find himself a decent flat,  
5 what's the world coming to?"  
She had an overnight bag with her; she took off her clothes in the bathroom and came back in a nightdress. They climbed into bed and he turned out the light. She felt very tense to him. He felt very tense to himself.  
10 "We could just cuddle," he suggested.  
"What is cuddle?"  
He demonstrated.  
"So cuddle is not fucking?"  
"No, cuddle is not fucking."  
15 "O.K., cuddle."  
After that they relaxed, and she soon fell asleep.  
The next time, after some kissing, he reacquainted himself with the lubricated struggle of the condom. He knew he was meant to unroll it, but found himself trying to  
20 tug it on like a sock, pulling at the rim in a haphazard way. Doing it in the dark didn't help, either. But she didn't say anything, or cough discouragingly, and eventually he turned toward her. She pulled up her nightie and he climbed on top of her. His mind was half filled with lust and fucking, and  
25 half empty, as if wondering what he was up to. He didn't think about her very much that first time. It was a question of looking out for yourself. Later you could look out for the other person.  
"Was that O.K.?" he said after a while.  
30 "Yes, was O.K."  
Vernon laughed in the dark.  
"Are you laughing at me? Was not O.K. for you?"  
"Andrea," he said, "everything's O.K. Nobody's laughing at you. I won't let anyone laugh at you." As she slept, he  
35 thought, We're starting again, both of us. I don't know what she's had in her past, but maybe we're both starting again from the same sort of low point, and that's O.K. Everything's O.K.

cuddle	putte sammen
reacquaint	gøre sig fortrolig med igen
lubricated	fedtede
hap' hazard	tilfældig
nightie	natkjole

The next night, she was more relaxed, and gripped him  
hard with her legs. He couldn't tell whether she came or  
not. 1

"Gosh, you're strong," he said afterward.

"Is strong bad?" 5

"No, no. Not at all. Strong's good."

But the time after he noticed that she didn't grip him so  
hard. She didn't much like him playing with her breasts,  
either. No, that was unfair. She didn't seem to mind if he did  
or didn't. Or, rather, if he wanted to, that was fine, but it was  
for him, not for her. That's what he understood, anyway. 10  
And who said you had to talk about everything right away?

Now he was glad neither of them was any good at flirting.  
Flirting was a kind of deception. Whereas Andrea was never  
anything but straight with him. She didn't talk much, but 15  
what she said was what she did. She would meet him where  
and when he asked, and be standing there, looking out for  
him, brushing a streak of hair out of her eyes, holding on to  
her bag more firmly than was necessary in this town.

"You're as reliable as a Polish builder," he told her one 20  
day.

"Is that good?"

"That's very good."

"Is English expression?"

"It is now." 25

She asked him to correct her English when she made a  
mistake. He got her to say "I don't think so" instead of "I do  
not think," but, actually, he preferred the way she talked.  
He always understood her, and those phrases that weren't  
quite right seemed part of her. Maybe he didn't want her  
talking like an Englishwoman in case she started behaving 30  
like one - well, like one in particular. And, anyway, he didn't  
want to play the teacher.

It was the same in bed. Things are what they are, he  
said to himself. If she always wore a nightie, perhaps it 35  
was a Catholic thing - not that she ever mentioned going  
to church. When he asked her to do stuff to him, she did it,  
and seemed to enjoy it, but she didn't ask him to do stuff



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1 back to her – didn't even seem to like his hand down there  
much. But this didn't bother him; she was allowed to be  
who she was.

5 She never asked him in. If he dropped her off, she'd be  
5 trotting up the concrete path before he'd got the hand brake  
on; if he picked her up, she'd already be outside, waiting.  
At first this was fine, then it began to feel a bit odd, so he  
asked to see where she lived, just for a minute, so he could  
imagine where she was when she wasn't with him. They  
10 went back into the house – nineteen-thirties semi, pebble  
dash, multi-occupation, metal window frames rusting up  
badly – and she opened her door. His professional eye took  
in the dimensions, furnishings, and probable rental cost;  
his lover's eye took in a small dressing table with photos  
15 in plastic frames and a picture of the Virgin. There was a  
single bed, a tiny sink, a rubbish microwave, a small TV,  
and clothes on hangers clipped precariously to the picture  
rail. Something in him was touched by seeing her life laid  
out like that in the minute or so before they stepped outside  
20 again. To cover this sudden emotion, Vernon said, "You  
shouldn't be paying more than fifty-five. Plus services. I  
can get you somewhere bigger for the same price."

"Is O.K."

25 Now that spring was here, they went for drives. They  
25 drove into Suffolk and looked at English things: half-timber  
houses with no damp courses, thatched roofs that put you  
in a higher insurance band. They stopped by a village green  
and he sat down on a bench overlooking a pond, but she  
didn't fancy that, so they looked at the church instead.  
30 He hoped she wouldn't ask him to explain the difference  
between Anglicans and Catholics – or the history behind  
it all. Something about Henry VIII wanting to get married  
again. The King's knob. All sorts of things came down to  
sex if you looked at them closely enough. But, anyway, she  
35 didn't ask.

She began to take his arm, and to smile more easily. He  
gave her a key to his flat; tentatively, she started leaving  
overnight stuff there. One Sunday, in the dark, he reached

semi (= semi-detached)  
halvt (dobbeithus)  
pebble dash    stenpuds  
multi-occu'pation    "der  
boede mange mennesker"  
the Virgin    Jomfru Maria  
picture rail    billedliste  
services    el og vand  
half-timber    bindingsværk  
damp course    dampspærre  
thatched roof    stråtag  
band    gruppe  
tentatively    forsøgsvis

26

rhythm period      periode,  
 hvor risikoen for at blive  
 gravid er mindre  
 as happy as Larry      meget lykkelig  
 take to sb.      fatte sympati  
    for

across to the bedside drawer and found the condom packet 1  
 was empty. He swore, and had to explain.

"Is O.K."

"No, Andrea, is bloody not O.K. Last thing I need is you  
 getting pregnant." 5

"I do not think so. Not get pregnant. Is O.K." 5

He trusted her. Later, as she slept, he wondered what  
 exactly she'd meant. That she couldn't have kids? Or that  
 she was taking something herself, to make doubly sure? If  
 so, what would the Virgin Mary have to say about that? Let's 10  
 hope she isn't relying on the rhythm method, he suddenly  
 thought. Guaranteed to fail on a regular basis and keep the  
 Pope as happy as Larry. 10

Time passed. She met Gary and Melanie; they took to  
 her. She didn't tell them what to do; they told her, and she 15  
 went along with it. They also asked her some questions he'd  
 never dared, or cared, to ask. 15

"Andrea, are you married?"

"Can we watch TV as long as we like?"

"Were you married?" 20

"If I ate three, would I be sick?" 20

"Why aren't you married?"

"How old are you?"

"What team do you support?"

"You got any children?" 25

"Will you take me to the toilet?" 25

"Are you and Dad getting married?"

He learned the answers to some of these questions. Like  
 any sensible woman, Andrea wasn't telling her age. One  
 night, in the dark, after he'd delivered the kids back and 30  
 was too upset for sex, as he always was on those occasions,  
 he said, "Do you think you could love me?" 30

"Yes, I think I would love you."

"Is that a would or a could?"

"What is the difference?" 35

He paused. "There's no difference. I'll take either. I'll  
 take both. I'll take whatever you've got to give." 35

He didn't know how it started, the next bit. Because he 35



clued up      velinformeret  
outgoings      udgifter

1 was beginning to fall in love with her, or because he didn't  
really want to? Or wanted to but was afraid? Or was it that,  
deep down, he had an urge to fuck everything up? That's  
5 what his wife – ex-wife – had said to him one morning over  
breakfast: "Look, Vernon, I don't hate you, I really don't. I  
just can't live with you because you always fuck things up."  
Her statement seemed to come out of the blue. True, he  
snored, and dropped his clothes where he shouldn't, and  
watched the normal amount of sports on TV. But he came  
10 home on time, loved his kids, didn't chase other women. In  
some people's eyes, that was the same as fucking things up.

"Can I ask you something?"

"For sure."

"No, 'for sure' is American. English is 'yes.' "

15 She looked at him, as if to say, Why are you now  
correcting my English? "Yes," she repeated.

"When I didn't have a condom and you said it was O.K.,  
did you mean it was O.K. then or O.K. always?"

"O.K. always."

20 "Blimey, do you know what a twelve-pack costs?"

That was the wrong thing to say, even he could see that.  
Christ, maybe she'd had some terrible abortion or been  
raped or something.

"So you can't have children?"

25 "No. Do you hate me?"

"Andrea, for God's sake." He took her hand. "I've got two  
kids already. Point is, is it O.K. with you?"

She looked down. "No. Is not O.K. with me. It makes me  
very unhappy."

30 "Well, we could ... I don't know, see the doctor. See an  
expert." He imagined that the experts over here were more  
clued up.

"No, no expert. *No expert.*"

"Fine, no experts."

35 He thought, Adoption? But can I afford another, with my  
outgoings?

He stopped buying condoms. He started asking ques-  
tions, as tactfully as he could. But tact was like flirting:

whirry            surrende  
drizzly           med stavregn

either you had it or you didn't. No, that wasn't right. It was  
just easier to be tactful if you didn't care whether you knew  
things or not, harder when you cared.

"Why are you now asking these questions?"

"Am I?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Sorry."

But he was only sorry that she'd noticed. Also sorry  
that he wouldn't stop. Couldn't stop. When they first got  
together, he'd liked the fact that he didn't know anything  
about her; it had made things different, fresher. Gradually,  
she'd learned about him, while he hadn't learned about  
her. Why not just continue like that? *Because you always  
fuck things up*, his wife, ex-wife, whispered. No, he didn't  
accept that. If you fall in love, you want to know. Good, bad,  
indifferent. Not that you're looking for bad things. That's  
just what falling in love means, Vernon said to himself. Or  
thinking about falling in love. Anyway, Andrea was a nice  
person – he was certain about that. So what was wrong  
with finding out about a nice person behind her back?

They all knew him at the Right Plaice: Mrs. Ridgewell, the  
manageress; Jill, the other waitress; and old Herbert, who  
owned the restaurant but only dropped in when he fancied  
a free bite. Vernon chose a time when the lunch trade was  
starting, and walked past the counter toward the toilets.  
The room – more of a cupboard, really – where the staff left  
their coats and bags was just opposite the gents. Vernon  
went in, found Andrea's bag, took her keys, and came back  
out flapping his hands as if to say, That whirry old hand  
dryer never quite does the trick, does it?

He winked at Andrea, walked to the hardware shop,  
complained about clients who had only one set of keys,  
strolled around for a bit, picked up the new set, went back  
to the Right Plaice, prepared a line about the chilly weather  
playing havoc with his bladder, didn't need to use it, put her  
keys back, and ordered a cappuccino.

The first time he went, it was the sort of drizzly after-  
noon when no one looks at anyone who's passing. A chap



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1 in a raincoat goes up a concrete path to a front door with  
frosted-glass panels. Inside, he opens another door, sits on  
a bed, gets up suddenly, smooths out the dent in the bed,  
turns, sees that the microwave isn't rubbish, actually, puts  
5 his hand under the pillow, feels one of her nightdresses,  
looks at the clothes hanging from the picture rail, touches  
a dress she hasn't worn before, deliberately doesn't let  
himself look at the pictures on the little dressing table,  
sees himself out, locks up behind him. No one did anything  
10 wrong, did they?

dent buie  
go down on one's haunches sætte sig på hug  
perm permanentet hår  
ease open lørke  
lane divider tov,  
der opdeler svømmebaner  
rubber cap badenætte

The second time, he examined the Virgin Mary and the  
half-dozen pictures. He didn't pick anything up, just went  
down on his haunches and looked at the photos in their  
plastic frames. That must be Mum, he thought, looking at  
15 the tight perm and big glasses. And there's little Andrea, all  
blond and chubby. And is that a brother or a boyfriend? And  
here's somebody's birthday with so many faces you can't  
tell who's important and who isn't. He looked again at the  
six- or seven-year-old Andrea – just a bit older than Melanie  
20 – and took the image home in his head.

The third time, he eased open the top drawer; it stuck,  
and Andrea's mum toppled over. There was mainly under-  
wear, most of it familiar. Then he went to the bottom drawer,  
because that's where secrets are normally kept, and found  
25 only sweaters and a couple of scarves. But in the middle  
drawer, under some shirts, were three items he laid on the  
bed in the same order, and even the same distance apart,  
as he found them. On the right was a medal, in the middle  
a photo framed in metal, on the left a passport. The photo  
30 showed four girls in a swimming pool, their arms around  
one another, a lane divider with cork floats separating one  
pair from the other.

They were all smiling up at the camera, and had wrinkles  
in their white rubber caps. He instantly picked out Andrea,  
35 second from the left. The medal showed a swimmer diving  
into a pool, with some lines of German writing on the back  
and a date, 1986. How old would she have been then –  
eighteen, twenty? The passport confirmed it: born 1967,

30

jog along	gå på bedste beskub
up the aisle	blive gift
up the garden path	blive snydt
text	sende en sms

which made her forty. It said she'd been born in Halle, so she was German.

And that was that. No diary, no letters, no vibrator. No secrets. He was in love – no, he was thinking about being in love – with a woman who'd once won a swimming medal. Where was the harm in knowing that? Not that she swam anymore. And now he remembered how she'd got all jumpy when Gary and Melanie had tried to make her go to the water's edge and splash around. Maybe she didn't want to be reminded. Or perhaps it was quite different, swimming in a competition pool versus having a dip in the sea. Like ballet dancers not wanting to do the sort of dancing everyone else did.

That evening, he was deliberately jolly when they met, even a bit silly, but she seemed to notice, so he stopped. After a while, he felt normal again. Almost normal, anyway. When he first started going out with girls, he'd found there were moments when he suddenly thought, I don't understand anything at all. With his second girlfriend, Karen, for instance: they'd been jogging along nicely, no pressure, having fun, when she'd asked, "So where's all this leading, then?" As if there were only two choices: up the aisle or up the garden path. Other times, with other women, he'd say something, just something ordinary, and – splash – he'd find himself in deep water.

They were in bed, Andrea's nightie pulled up around her waist in the fat roll he was quite used to feeling against his belly, and he was going it a bit, when she shifted her legs and crushed him with them, like a nutcracker, he thought.

"Mmm, big strong swimmer's legs," he muttered.

She didn't answer, but he knew she'd heard. He carried on, but could tell from her body that her mind wasn't on things. Afterward, they lay on their backs, and he said some stuff, but she didn't pick up on anything. Oh, well, work tomorrow, Vernon thought. He went to sleep.

When he dropped by the Right Plaice to pick her up that evening, Mrs. Ridgewell said Andrea had called in sick. He rang her mobile but she didn't answer, so he texted her.

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1 Then he went around to the house and tried her bell. He  
left it a couple of hours, phoned again, rang the bell, then  
let himself in.

booking clerk billetsælger

Her room was quite neat, and quite empty. No clothes  
5 on the picture rail, no photos on the little chest of drawers.  
Something made him open the microwave and look inside;  
all he saw was the circular plate. On the bed were two envel-  
opes, one for the landlord, the other for Mrs. Ridgewell.  
Nothing for him.

10 Mrs. Ridgewell asked if they'd had a quarrel. No, he said,  
they never quarrelled.

"She was a nice girl," the manageress said. "Very reli-  
able."

"Like a Polish builder."

15 "I hope you didn't say that to her. It's not a nice remark.  
And I don't think she was Polish."

"No, she wasn't." He looked out to sea. "*Oorals*," he found  
himself saying.

"Pardon?"

20 You went to the station and showed a photograph of the  
missing woman to the booking clerk, who remembered her  
face and told you where she'd bought a ticket to. That's  
what they did in films. But the nearest station was twelve  
miles away, and it didn't have a ticket office, just a machine  
25 you put money or plastic into. And he didn't even have a  
picture of her. They'd never done that thing couples do,  
crowding into a booth together, the girl sitting on the man's  
lap, both giggly and out of focus. They were probably too  
old for that, anyway.

30 At home, he Googled Andrea Morgen and got four  
hundred and ninety-seven thousand results. Then he put  
her in quotes and cut it down to three hundred and ninety-  
three. Did he want to search for "Andrea Morgan"? No, he  
didn't want to search for someone else. Most of the results  
35 were in German, and he scrolled through them helplessly.  
He'd never done languages at school, never needed them  
since. Then he had a thought. He looked up an online  
dictionary and found the German for "swimmer." It was a

scheme  
con'sent form

ana'bolic steroids

tendon

snap

acne

re'tarded

fertility

different word if you were a man or a woman. He typed in "Andrea Morgen" and "Schwimmerin."

Eight results, all in German. Two seemed to be from newspapers, one from an official report. And there was a picture of her. The same one he'd found in the drawer: there she was, second from the left, arms around her teammates, big wrinkles in her white swimming cap. He paused, then hit "Translate this page." Later, he found links to other pages, this time in English.

How could he have known, he asked himself. He could barely understand the science and wasn't interested in the politics. But he could understand, and was interested in, things that, even as he looked out at the sea from a window table in the Right Plaice, were already beginning to change his memory of her.

Halle was in what used to be East Germany. There had been a state recruiting scheme. Girls were picked out when they were as young as eleven – only four years older than that chubby little girl in the photograph. Vernon tried to put together her probable life. Her parents signing a consent form, perhaps a secrecy form as well. Andrea enrolled in the Child and Youth Sports School, then in the Dynamo Sports Club in East Berlin. She had some school lessons, but was mostly trained to swim and swim. It was a great honor to be a member of the Dynamo: that was why she'd had to leave home. Blood was taken from her earlobe to test how fit she was. There were pink pills and blue pills. Vitamins, she was told. Later, there were injections – just more vitamins. Except that they were anabolic steroids and testosterone. It was forbidden to refuse. The training motto was "You eat the pills or you die." The coaches made sure she swallowed them.

She didn't die. Other things happened instead. Muscles grew, but tendons didn't, so tendons snapped. There were sudden bursts of acne, a deepening of the voice, an increase of hair on the face and body; sometimes the pubic hair grew up over the stomach, even above the navel. There was retarded growth and problems with fertility. Vernon

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1 had to look up terms like "virilization" and "clitoris hypertrophy," then wished he hadn't. He didn't need to look up heart disease, liver disease, ovarian cysts, deformed children, blind children.

virilization maskulinisering  
hypertrophy overudvikling  
ovarian cyst  
cyst på eggstokkene  
relay stafet

5 They doped the girls because it worked. East German swimmers won gold medals everywhere, the women especially. Not that Andrea had got to that level. When the Berlin Wall came down and the scandal broke, when they put the trainers, doctors, bureaucrats – the poisoners – on trial,  
10 her name wasn't even mentioned. In spite of the pills, she hadn't made the national team. The others, the ones who went public about what had been done to their bodies and their minds, at least had gold medals and a few years of fame to show for it. Andrea had come out with nothing  
15 more than a relay medal at some forgotten championship in a country that no longer existed.

Vernon looked out at the concrete strip and the shingle beach, at the gray sea and the gray sky beyond. The view was pretending that it had always been the same, for as  
20 long as people had sat at this café window. Except that there used to be a row of beach huts blocking the view. Then someone had burned them down.

(2008)

### I. Analysis

1. How does the short story open? What is the effect of this opening?
2. Describe the atmosphere in the text; find examples to support your points.
3. Comment on the setting.
4. Characterize Vernon.
5. Characterize Andrea.
6. Characterize the relationship between Vernon and Andrea.
7. Comment on "he'd liked the fact that he didn't know anything about her" (p. 142, ll. 10-11).

8. Comment on the point of view of the story.
9. Is Vernon a typical representative of a Western male?
10. Comment on the title.
11. What are the themes?

**II. Typical Post-Modern characteristics**

Find typical Post-Modern traits the story.

**III. Creativity**

1. Write Vernon's blog after Andrea has left.
2. Write an essay (in about 250 words) in which you discuss to which length athletes should be pushed to achieve.

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## HOTEL DES BOOBS

'Hotel des Pins!' said Harry. 'More like Hotel des Boobs.'

'Come away from that window,' said Brenda. 'Stop behaving like a Peeping Tom.'

'What d'you mean, a Peeping Tom?' said Harry, continuing to squint down at the pool area through the slats of their bedroom shutters. 'A Peeping Tom is someone who interferes with someone else's privacy.'

'This is a private hotel.'

'Hotel des Tits. Hotel des Bristols. Hey, that's not bad!' He turned his head to flash a grin across the room. 'Hotel Bristols, in the plural. Geddit?'

If Brenda got it, she wasn't impressed. Harry resumed his watch. 'I'm not interfering with anyone's privacy,' he said. 'If they don't want people to look at their tits, why don't they cover them up?'

'Well go and look, then. Don't peep. Go down to the pool and have a good look.' Brenda dragged a comb angrily through her hair. 'Hold an inspection.'

'You're going to have to go topless, you know, Brenda, before this holiday's over.'

Brenda snorted derisively.

'Why not? You've nothing to be ashamed of.' He turned his head again to leer encouragingly at her. 'You've still got a fine pair.'

'Thanks very much, I'm sure,' said Brenda. 'But I intend to keep them covered as per usual.'

'When in Rome,' said Harry.

'This isn't Rome, it's the Côte d'Azur.'

'Côte des Tits,' said Harry. 'Côte des Knockers.'

'If I'd known you were going to go on like this,' said Brenda, 'I'd never have come here.'

SQUINT DOWN =  
KIMBE DOME =  
PE SAMMEN  
VED MOD

SLATS =  
LAMELLE

SHUTTLERS =  
PELSIENNER

BRI STOL =  
SLANG FOR  
BOYSTEL

DERISIVELY =  
SPOTTENDE

LEER =  
KIBGE FOERT

## HOTEL DES BOOBS

For years Harry and Brenda had taken family holidays every summer in Guernsey, where Brenda's parents lived. But now that the children were grown up enough to make their own arrangements, they had decided to have a change. Brenda had always wanted to see the South of France, and they felt they'd earned the right to treat themselves for once. They were quite comfortably off, now that Brenda, a recent graduate of the Open University, had a full-time job as a teacher. It had caused an agreeable stir in the managerial canteen at Barnard Castings when Harry dropped the name of their holiday destination in among the Benidorms and Palmas, the Costas of this and that, whose merits were being debated by his colleagues.

'The French Riviera, Harry?'

'Yes, a little hotel near St Raphael. Brenda got the name out of a book.'

'Going up in the world, aren't we?'

'Well, it is pricey. But we thought, well, why not be extravagant, while we're still young enough to enjoy it.'

'Enjoy eying all those topless birds, you mean.'

'Is that right?' said Harry, with an innocence that was not entirely feigned. Of course he knew in theory that in certain parts of the Mediterranean girls sunbathed topless on the beach, and he had seen pictures of the phenomenon in his secretary's daily newspaper, which he flipped regularly for the sake of such illustrations. But the reality had been a shock. Not so much the promiscuous, anonymous breast-baring of the beach, as the more intimate and socially complex nudity around the hotel pool. What made the pool different, and more disturbing, was that the women who lay half-naked around its perimeter all day were the same as those you saw immaculately dressed for dinner in the evening, or nodded and smiled politely at in the lobby, or exchanged small talk about the weather with in the bar. And since Brenda found the tree-shaded pool, a few miles inland, infinitely preferable to the heat and glare and crowdedness of the beach (not to mention the probable pollution of the sea), it became the principal theatre of Harry's initiation into the new code of mammary manners.

Harry - he didn't mind admitting it - had always had a thing about women's breasts. Some men went for legs, or bums, but Harry had always been what the boys at Barnard's called a tit-fancier. 'You were weaned too early,' Brenda used to say, a diagnosis that Harry accepted with a complacent grin. He always glanced, a simple reflex action, at

MANAGEMENT =  
BESTREELSES  
DIREKTOR =

BIRDS =  
SLANG FOR  
KVINDEL

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FALSK

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IMMACULATE =  
ULASTELIG  
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the bust of any sexually interesting female that came within his purview, and had spent many idle moments speculating about the shapes that were concealed beneath their sweaters, blouses and brassieres. It was disconcerting, to say the least, to find this harmless pastime rendered totally redundant under the Provençal sun. He had scarcely begun to assess the figures of the women at the Hotel des Pins before they satisfied his curiosity to the last pore. Indeed, in most cases he saw them half-naked before he met them, as it were, socially. The snoopy Englishwoman, for instance, mother of twin boys and wife to the tubby stockbroker never seen without yesterday's Financial Times in his hand and a smug smile on his face. Or the female partner of the German couple who worshipped the sun with religious zeal, turning and anointing themselves according to a strict timetable and with the aid of a quartz alarm clock. Or the deeply tanned brunette of a certain age whom Harry had privately christened Carmen Miranda, because she spoke an eager and rapid Spanish, or it might have been Portuguese, into the cordless telephone which the waiter Antoine brought to her at frequent intervals.

Mrs Snooty had hardly any breasts at all when she was lying down, just boyish pads of what looked like muscle, tipped with funny little turned-up nipples that quivered like the noses of two small rodents when she stood up and moved about. The German lady's breasts were perfect cones, smooth and firm as if turned on a lathe, and never seemed to change their shape whatever posture she adopted; whereas Carmen Miranda's were like two brown satin bags filled with a viscous fluid that ebbed and flowed across her rib-cage in continual motion as she turned and twisted restlessly on her mattress, awaiting the next phone call from her absent lover. And this morning there were a pair of teenage girls down by the pool whom Harry hadn't seen before, reclining side by side, one in green bikini pants and the other in yellow, regarding their recently acquired breasts, hemispheres smooth and flawless as jelly moulds, with the quiet satisfaction of housewives watching scones rise.

'There are two newcomers today,' said Harry. 'Or should I say, four.'

'Are you coming down?' said Brenda, at the door. 'Or are you going to spend the morning peering through the shutters?'

'I'm coming. Where's my book?' He looked around the room for his Jack Higgins paperback.

'You're not making much progress with it, are you?' said Brenda

PURVIEW =  
SYNSFELT  
DISCONCERT =  
FORURLOKONDE  
PROVENÇAL =  
PROVENÇALISKE  
- PROVENÇALISKE  
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VICIOUS =  
TAKTFULD-  
BUD  
RIB-CAGE =  
RIBBEN  
RECLINING =  
HVILENDE

sarcastically. 'I think you ought to move the bookmark every day, for appearance's sake.'

A book was certainly basic equipment for discreet boob-watching down by the pool: something to peer over, or round, something to look up from, as if distracted by a sudden noise or movement, at the opportune moment, just as the bird a few yards away slipped her costume off her shoulders, or rolled on to her back. Another essential item was a pair of sunglasses, as dark as possible, to conceal the precise direction of one's gaze. For there was, Harry realized, a protocol involved in toplessness. For a man to stare at, or even let his eyes rest for a measurable span of time upon, a bared bosom, would be bad form, because it would violate the fundamental principle upon which the whole practice was based, namely, that there was nothing noteworthy about it, that it was the most natural, neutral thing in the world. (Antoine was particularly skilled in managing to serve his female clients cold drinks, or take their orders for lunch, stooping low over their prone figures, without seeming to notice their nakedness.) Yet this principle was belied by another, which confined toplessness to the pool and its margins. As soon as they moved on to the terrace, or into the hotel itself, the women covered their upper halves. Did bare tits gain and lose erotic value in relation to arbitrary territorial zones? Did the breast eagerly gazed upon, fondled and nuzzled by husband or lover in the privacy of the bedroom, become an object of indifference, a mere anatomical protuberance no more interesting than an elbow or kneecap, on the concrete rim of the swimming pool? Obviously not. The idea was absurd. Harry had little doubt that, like himself, all the men present, including Antoine, derived considerable pleasure and stimulation from the toplessness of most of the women, and it was unlikely that the women themselves were unaware of this fact. Perhaps they found it exciting. Harry speculated, to expose themselves knowing that the men must not betray any sign of arousal; and their own menfolk might share, in a vicarious, proprietorial way in this excitement. Especially if one's own wife was better endowed than some of the others. To intercept the admiring and envious glance of another man at your wife's boobs, to think silently to yourself, 'Yes, all right matey, you can look, as long as it's not too obvious, but only I'm allowed to touch 'em, see?' That might be very exciting.

Lying beside Brenda at the poolside, dizzy from the heat and the consideration of these puzzles and paradoxes, Harry was suddenly transfixed by an arrow of perverse desire: to see his wife naked, and

lust after her, through the eyes of other men. He rolled over on to his stomach and put his mouth to Brenda's ear.

'If you'll take your top off,' he whispered, 'I'll buy you that dress we saw in St Raphael. The one for twelve hundred francs.'

RULED FOOLS:

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GAPE =  
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The author had reached this point in his story, which he was writing seated at an umbrella-shaded table on the terrace overlooking the hotel pool, using a fountain pen and ruled foolscap, as was his wont, and having accumulated many cancelled and rewritten pages, as was also his wont, when without warning a powerful wind arose. It made the pine trees in the hotel grounds shiver and hiss, raised wavelets on the surface of the pool, knocked over several umbrellas, and whirled the leaves of the author's manuscript into the air. Some of these floated back on to the terrace, or the margins of the pool, or into the pool itself, but many were funnelled with astonishing speed high into the air, above the trees, by the hot breath of the wind. The author staggered to his feet and gaped unbelievably at the leaves of foolscap rising higher and higher, like escaped kites, twisting and turning in the sun, white against the azure sky. It was like the visitation of some god or daemon, a pentecost in reverse, drawing words away instead of imparting them. The author felt taped. The female sunbathers around the pool, as if similarly conscious, covered their naked breasts as they stood and watched the whirling leaves of paper recede into the distance. Faces were turned towards the author, smiles of sympathy mixed with *Schadenfreude*. Bidden by the sharp voice of their mother, the English twins scurried round the pool's edge collecting up loose sheets, and brought them with doggy eagerness back to their owner. The German, who had been in the pool at the time of the wind, came up with two sodden pages, covered with weeping longhand, held between finger and thumb, and laid them carefully on the author's table to dry. Pierre, the waiter, presented another sheet on his tray. 'C'est le petit mistral,' he said with a *moue* of commiseration. 'Quel dommage!' The author thanked them mechanically, his eyes still on the airborne pages, now mere specks in the distance, sinking slowly down into the pine woods. Around the hotel the air was quite still again. Slowly the guests returned to their loungers and mattresses. The women discreetly uncovered their bosoms, renewed the application of Ambre Solaire, and resumed the pursuit of the perfect tan.

'Simon! Jasper!' said the Englishwoman, 'Why don't you go for a

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walk in the woods and see if you can find any more of the gentleman's papers?

'Oh, no,' said the author urgently. 'Please don't bother. I'm sure they're miles away by now. And they're really not important.'

'No bother,' said the Englishwoman. 'They'll enjoy it.'

'Like a treasure hunt,' said her husband. 'Or rather, paperchase. He chuckled at his own joke. The boys trotted off obediently into the woods. The author retired to his room, to await the return of his wife, who had missed all the excitement, from St Raphael.

'I've bought the most darling little dress,' she announced as she entered the room. 'Don't ask me how much it cost.'

'Twelve hundred francs?'

'Good God, no, not as much as that. Seven hundred and fifty, actually. What's the matter, you look funny?'

'We've got to leave this hotel.'

He told her what had happened.

'I shouldn't worry,' said his wife. 'Those little brats probably won't find any more sheets.'

'Oh yes they will. They'll regard it as a challenge, like the Duke of Edinburgh Award. They'll comb the pine woods for miles around. And if they find anything, they're sure to read it.'

'They wouldn't understand.'

'Their parents would. Imagine Mrs Snooty finding her nipples compared to the nose tips of small rodents.'

The author's wife spluttered with laughter. 'You are a fool,' she said.

'It wasn't my fault,' he protested. 'The wind sprang out of nowhere.'

'An act of God?'

'Precisely.'

'Well, I don't suppose He approved of that story. I can't say I cared much for it myself. How was it going to end?'

The author's wife knew the story pretty well as far as he had got with it, because he had read it out to her in bed the previous night.

'Brenda accepts the bribe to go topless.'

'I don't think she would.'

'Well, she does. And Harry is pleased as Punch. He feels that he and

Brenda have finally liberated themselves, joined the sophisticated set.

He imagines himself telling the boys back at Barnard Castings about it, making them ribaldly envious. He gets such a hard-on that he has to lie on his stomach all day.'

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'Tut, tut!' said his wife. 'How crude.'

'He can't wait to get to bed that night. But just as they're retiring, they separate for some reason I haven't worked out yet, and Harry goes up to their room first. She doesn't come at once, so Harry gets ready for bed, lies down, and falls asleep. He wakes up two hours later and finds Brenda is still missing. He is alarmed and puts on his dressing gown and slippers to go in search of her. Just at that moment, she comes in. *Where the hell have you been?* he says. She has a peculiar look on her face, goes to the fridge in their room and drinks a bottle of Perrier water before she tells him her story. She says that Antoine intercepted her downstairs to present her with a bouquet. It seems that each week all the male staff of the hotel take a vote on which female guest has the shapeliest breasts, and Brenda has come top of the poll. The bouquet was a mark of their admiration and respect. She is distressed because she left it behind in Antoine's room.'

'Antoine's room?'

'Yes, he had coaxed her into seeing his room, a little chalet in the woods, and gave her a drink, and one thing led to another, and she ended up letting him make love to her.'

'How improbable.'

'Not necessarily. Taking off her bra in public released some dormant streak of wantonness in Brenda that Harry had never seen before. She is rather drunk and quite shameless. She taunts him with graphic testimony to Antoine's skill as a lover, and compares Harry's genital equipment unfavourably to the Frenchman's.'

'Worse and worse,' said the author's wife.

'At that point Harry hits her.'

'Oh, nice. Very nice.'

'Brenda half undresses and crawls into bed. A couple of hours later, she wakes up. Harry is standing by the window staring down at the empty pool, a ghostly blue in the light of the moon. Brenda gets out of bed, comes across and touches him gently on the arm. *Come to bed, she says. It wasn't true, what I told you. He turns his face slowly towards her. Not true? No, she says, I made it up. I went and sat in the car for two hours with a bottle of wine, and I made it up. Why?* he says. *I don't know, she says. To teach you a lesson, I suppose. But I shouldn't have. Come to bed.* But Harry just shakes his head and turns back to stare out of the window. *I never knew, he says, in a dead sort of voice, that you cared about the size of my prick. But I don't, she says. I made it all up.* Harry shakes his head disbelievingly, gazing down at the blue,

breastless margins of the pool. That's how the story was going to end, with those words, "the blue, breastless margins of the pool."

As he spoke these words, the author was himself standing at the window, looking down at the hotel pool from which all the guests had departed to change for dinner. Only the solitary figure of Pierre moved among the umbrellas and tables, collecting bathing towels and tea-trays.

'Him,' said the author's wife.

'Harry's fixation on women's breasts, you see,' said the author, 'has been displaced by an anxiety about his own body from which he will never be free.'

'Yes, I see that. I'm not stupid, you know.' The author's wife came to the window and looked down. 'Poor Pierre,' she said. 'He wouldn't dream of making a pass at me, or any of the other women. He's obviously gay.'

'Fortunately,' said the author, 'I didn't get that far with my story before the wind scattered it all over the countryside. But you'd better get out the Michelin and find another hotel. I can't stand the thought of staying on here, on textbooks all the time in case one of the guests comes back from a walk in the woods with a compromising piece of fiction in their paws. What an extraordinary thing to happen.'

'You know,' said the author's wife. 'It's really a better story.'

'Yes,' said the author. 'I think I shall write it. I'll call it "Tit for Tat".'

'No, call it "Hotel des Boobs",' said the author's wife. 'Theirs and yours.'

'What about yours?'

'Just leave them out of it, please.'

Much later that night, when they were in bed and just dropping off to sleep, the author's wife said:

'You don't really wish I would go topless, do you?'

'No, of course not,' said the author. But he didn't sound entirely convinced, or convincing.

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