**Introduction to Literary Studies**

**Narration**

The Parsonage

All true histories contain instruction; though, in some, the treasure may be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity, that the dry, shrivelled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut. Whether this be the case with my history or not, I am hardly competent to judge. I sometimes think it might prove useful to some, and entertaining to others; but the world may judge for itself. Shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to venture, and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend.

My father was a clergyman of the north of England, who was deservedly respected by all who knew him; and in his younger days, lived pretty comfortably on the joint income of a small incumbency and a snug little property of his own. My mother, who married him against the wishes of her friends, was a squire’s daughter, and a woman of spirit. In vain was it represented to her, that if she became the poor parson’s wife, she must relinquish her carriage and her lady’s-maid, and all the luxuries and elegances of affluence, which to her were little less than the necessaries of life. A carriage and a lady’s-maid were great conveniences; but, thank Heaven, she had feet to carry her, and hands to minister to her own necessities. An elegant house and spacious grounds were not to be despised, but she would rather live in a cottage with Richard Grey than in a palace with any other man in the world.

Anne Brontë: *Agnes Grey* (1846)

Part One

They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, ‘because she pretty like pretty self’ Christophine said.

She was my father’s second wife, far too young for him they thought, and, worse still, a Martinique girl. When I asked her why so few people came to see us, she told me that the road from Spanish Town to Coulibri Estate where we lived was very bad and that road repairing was now a thing of the past. (My father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed – all belonged to the past).

Another day I heard her talking to Mr Luttrell, our neighbour and her only friend. ‘Of course they have their own misfortunes. Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed. Some will wait for a long time.’

How could she know that Mr Luttrell would be the first who grew tired of waiting? One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property – Nelson’s Rest it was called – and strangers from Spanish Town rode up to gossip and discuss the tragedy.

‘Live at Nelson’s Rest? Not for love or money. An unlucky place.’

Mr Luttrell’s house was left empty, shutters banging in the wind. Soon the black people said it was haunted, they wouldn’t go near it. And no one came near us.

I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped – perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass.

She still rode about every morning not caring that the black people stood about in groups to jeer at her, especially after her riding clothes grew shabby (they notice clothes, they know about money).

Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*. 1966

Prologue

*Falling*

No one is watching the woman on her way towards death.

She is seen, unconsciously witnessed. A tall handsome woman in a white muslin gown and red handkerchief shawl walking alone in the October rain.

Not strolling. A boy driving a cow passes her on the Chelsea road. And he feels for a moment, like a gust, her strenuousness and purpose as she plunges past him.

She has come out of London, that rampart of smoke on the horizon, and she has walked all the way, and her skirts are crusted with mud. A housemaid in cloak and clip-clapping pattens, returning from an errand to her master’s villa at the riverside, notices that: stares: sees the high eager colour in the woman’s cheeks, her straggles of auburn hair. Forgets, by the time she reaches the kitchen fire.

Low flat plashy meadows, and no more colour than an engraving. From time to time the woman looks up at the sky and studies its complexion. Downriver a pumping-house chimney smokes, a wind-mill makes an unmoving cross.

At Battersea Bridge, for the first time, her stride slows. She appear irresolute: halts: looks up and down the river. Decides.

The boatman spits absently, considering the strange request of this strange woman who has come at him out of the grey twilight.

‘All very well,’ he says, scratching his neck, and ‘I don’t say I don’t trust you. Only…’ The boat is for hire, yes, but he rows it: that is his trade. ‘I can’t allow…’ But there has been no work at the little timber wharf all day, and the woman has money. She rattles the coins in her large white cupped hand like dice, impatiently.

Soon she is in the boat and rowing, with the same strength and determination, upriver and away from wharves and warehouses. Willows loom under clotted clouds, and light retreats as the rain comes down harder, fluttering on the water. Now she is evading human eyes altogether: no one to see as she brings the boat in to the bank, down below Putney Bridge.

She steps out, not minding sodden skirts, liking them so, and stands for a minute with her arms up against the timber struts of the bridge, examining the water with sharp sips of breath. A faint moan, then she scrabbles for stones, fills her pockets. Her step is still vigorous when she goes up to the bridge.

Jude Morgan: *Passions* (2004)