**Introduction to Literary Studies**

**Exercise: Character and Theme**

I was supposed to be having the time of my life.

I was supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls just like me all over America who wanted nothing more than to be tripping about in those same size seven patent leather shoes I’d bought in Bloomingdale’s one lunch hour with a black patent leather belt and black patent leather pocket-book to match. And when my picture came out in the magazine the twelve of us were working on – drinking martinis in a skimpy, imitation silver lamé bodice stuck on to a big, fat cloud of white tulle, on some Starlight Roof, in the company of several anonymous young men with all-American bone structures hired or loaned for the occasion – everybody would think I must be having a real whirl.

Look what can happen in this country, they’d say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can’t afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car.

Only I wasn’t steering anything, not even myself. I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolley-bus. I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn’t bring myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo.

Sylvia Plath: *The Bell Jar*. 1963

I prefer to do things the difficult way. When I think there has been a miscarriage of justice, I get into the system, meet everyone, represent no one, and try and get to the truth. I never know whether my efforts will be successful. Sometimes, someone will confess, or drop a hint. Funnily enough, the criminal community often trusts me because I’m such an oddity, with my convent-school-Hindi and salon-cut curly hair. I look so far removed from the world of shady deals and drugs and knives and punishment that they know I can’t be a money-making lawyer or a fixer. I am just a powerless social worker, from my outsized red bindi to my kolhapuri chappals. When I tell them I want to see them free and living in a just world, they know I mean what I say because I wear my idealism like a brahmastra ready to slay all the rakshasas.

Sometimes, they too begin to believe, like me, that there could be redemption (the convent school I had gone to taught me optimistic things about guilt, confession, redemption).

Kishwar Desai: *Witness the Night*. 2010

My name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,507.

Eight years ago, when I first met Siobhan, she showed me this picture

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and I knew that it meant ‘sad’, which is what I felt when I found the dead dog.

Then she showed me this picture

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and I knew that it meant ‘happy’, like when I’m reading about the Apollo space missions, or when I am still awake at three or four in the morning and I can walk up and down the street and pretend I’m the only person in the whole world.

Mark Haddon: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time.* 2004