

Alina Maria UNGUREANU

**TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN ENGLISH
LITERATURE AND CIVILIZATION. THE 20TH CENTURY**

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**Topics and Questions for Discussion
in English Literature and Civilization.
The 20th Century**



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Introduction

The book, *Topics and questions for discussion in English Literature and Civilization. The 20th Century*, represents a collection of fragments that belong to the works of the most important writers of the 20th century.

This collection contains excerpts from such novels as: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, David Herbert Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Edward Morgan Forster's *A Room with a View*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the entire text of T.S. Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*, and one fragment of G.B. Shaw's play, *The Devil's Disciple*. The novels, that this collection makes reference to, have been highly appreciated by many of the nowadays critics.

The 20th century represents one of the most flourishing period in the English and European literature. Modern elements intertwine with the classical ones. The novelty of this period is to be seen not only in prose, but also in poetry and theater. The new century represents a new beginning.

Modernism as a literary movement reached its highest development in the 20th century. Modernist writers and poets based their works on such themes as: breakdown of social norms, alienation, spiritual loneliness, disillusionment, rejection of history, rejection of outdated social systems, objection to religious thoughts, substitution of mythical past, the effects that the Two World Wars had on humanity etc.

In point of the stylistic characteristics of the modernist prose and poetry, there can be mentioned the usage of: the free indirect speech, the stream of consciousness technique, the

figures of speech, the satire, the irony, the symbolic representations, the psychoanalysis, the multiple narrative points of view etc.

Alongside the prose of the century, the poetry has also suffered the changes imposed by the modernist period. The poets of the 20th century started from a post-Romantic, even Symbolist style and modernised their way of writing under the impact of the social, political and literary developments.

This collection of texts, *Topics and questions for discussion in English Literature and Civilization. The 20th Century*, aims to arouse the students' interest in what the further reading of the respective novels regards. The topics and questions that follow after each fragment have the role to increase the thorough study of the novels, of the theater play or of the poem. They make reference both to the given fragments, but also to the whole content so that they can also represent an effective way of self evaluation and, at the same time, they motivate the students to do further research on the different topics related to the given subjects.

Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Chapter 45

"WHEN Tamb' Itam, paddling¹ madly, came into the town-reach, the women, thronging the platforms before the houses, were looking out for the return of Dain Waris's little fleet of boats. The town had a festive air; here and there men, still with spears or guns in their hands, could be seen moving or standing on the shore in groups. Chinamen's shops had been opened early; but the market-place was empty, and a sentry, still posted at the corner of the fort, made out Tamb' Itam, and shouted to those within. The gate was wide open. Tamb' Itam jumped ashore and ran in headlong². The first person he met was the girl coming down from the house.

"Tamb' Itam, disordered, panting, with trembling lips and wild eyes, stood for a time before her as if a sudden spell had been laid on him. Then he broke out very quickly: 'They have killed Dain Waris and many more.' She clapped her hands, and her first words were, 'Shut the gates.' Most of the fortmen had gone back to their houses, but Tamb' Itam hurried on the few who remained for their turn of duty within. The girl stood in the middle of the courtyard while the others ran about. 'Doramin,' she cried despairingly, as Tamb' Itam passed her. Next time he went by he answered her thought rapidly, 'Yes. But we have all the powder in Patusan.' She caught him by the arm, and, pointing at the house, 'Call him out,' she whispered, trembling.

"Tamb' Itam ran up the steps. His master was sleeping. 'It is I, Tamb' Itam' he cried at the door, with tidings that cannot wait.' He saw Jim turn over on the pillow and open his eyes, and he burst out

¹ **pad•dle** / 'pædl / *v.* [intransitive and transitive] to move a small light boat through water, using one or more paddles.

² **head•long** / 'hedlɒŋ \$ -lɒ:ŋ / *adv.* very quickly, without looking where you are going.

at once. 'This Tuan, is a day of evil, an accursed³ day.' His master raised himself on his elbow to listen- just as Dain Waris had done. And then Tamb' Itam began his tale, trying to relate the story in order, calling Dain Waris Panglima, and saying: 'The Panglima then called out to the chief of his own boatmen, "Give Tamb' Itam something to eat"'- when his master put his feet to the ground and looked at him with such a discomposed face that the words remained in his throat.

"'Speak out,' said Jim. 'Is he dead?' 'May you live long,' cried Tamb' Itam. 'It was a most cruel treachery. He ran out at the first shots and fell...!' His master walked to the window and with his fist struck at the shutter. The room was made light; and then in a steady voice, but speaking fast, he began to give him orders to assemble a fleet of boats for immediate pursuit, go to this man, to the other- send messengers; and as he talked he sat down on the bed, stooping⁴ to lace his boots hurriedly, and suddenly looked up. 'Why do you stand here?' he asked very red-faced. 'Waste no time.' Tamb' Itam did not move. 'Forgive me, Tuan, but... but,' he began to stammer⁵. 'What?' cried his master aloud, looking terrible, leaning forward with his hands gripping the edge of the bed. 'It is not safe for thy⁶ servant to go out amongst the people,' said Tamb' Itam, after hesitating a moment.

"Then Jim understood. He had retreated from one world, for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruins upon his head. It was not safe for his servant to go out amongst his own people! I believe that in that very moment he had decided to defy the disaster in the only way it occurred to him such a disaster could be defied; but all I know is that, without a word, he came out of his room and sat before the long table, at the head of which he was accustomed to regulate the affairs of his world, proclaiming daily the truth that surely lived in his heart.

³ **ac•curs•ed** / ə'kɜ:səd, ə'kɜ:sɪd / *adj.* old use someone who is accursed has had a CURSE put on them.

⁴ **stoop** / stu:p / *verb* [intransitive] to bend your body forward and down.

⁵ **stam•mer 1** / 'stæmə / *v.* [intransitive and transitive] to speak with a lot of pauses and repeated sounds, either because you have a speech problem, or because you are nervous, excited etc..

⁶ **thy** / ðaɪ / *determiner old use your*

The dark powers should not rob him twice of his peace. He sat like a stone figure. Tamb' Itam, deferential, hinted at preparations for defence. The girl he loved came in and spoke to him, but he made a sign with his hand, and she was awed⁷ by the dumb appeal for silence in it. She went out on the verandah and sat on the threshold⁸, as if to guard him with her body from dangers outside.

"What thoughts passed through his head- what memories? Who can tell? Everything was gone, and he who had been once unfaithful to his trust had lost again all men's confidence. It was then, I believe, he tried to write- to somebody- and gave it up. Loneliness was closing on him. People had trusted him with their lives- only for that; and yet they could never, as he had said, never be made to understand him. Those without did not hear him make a sound. Later, towards the evening, he came to the door and called for Tamb' Itam. 'Well?' he asked. 'There is much weeping. Much anger, too,' said Tamb' Itam. Jim looked up at him. 'You know,' he murmured. 'Yes, Tuan,' said Tamb' Itam. 'Thy servant does know, and the gates are closed. We shall have to fight.' 'Fight? What for?' he asked. 'For our lives.' 'I have no life,' he said. Tamb' Itam heard a cry from the girl at the door. 'Who knows?' said Tamb' Itam. 'By audacity⁹ and cunning¹⁰ we may even escape. There is much fear in men's hearts, too.' He went out, thinking vaguely of boats and of open sea, leaving Jim and the girl together.

"I haven't the heart to set down here such glimpses as she had given me of the hour or more she has passed in there wrestling with him for the possession of her happiness. Whether he had any hope- what he expected, what he imagined- it is impossible to say. He was inflexible, and with the growing loneliness of his obstinacy his spirit seemed to rise above the ruins of his existence. She cried

⁷ **awe** / ə: / v. [transitive usually passive] *formal* if you are awed by someone or something, you feel great respect and liking for them, and are often slightly afraid of them.

⁸ **thresh•old** / 'θreʃhəʊld, -ʃəʊld / n. [countable] the entrance to a room or building, or the area of floor or ground at the entrance.

⁹ **au•dac•i•ty** / ə: 'dæsəti, ə: 'dæsiti / n. [uncountable] the quality of having enough courage to take risks or say impolite things.

¹⁰ **cun•ning** 1 / 'kʌnɪŋ / n. [uncountable] the ability to achieve what you want by deceiving people in a clever way.

'Fight!' into his ear. She could not understand. There was nothing to fight for. He was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself. He came out into the courtyard, and behind him, with streaming hair, wild of face, breathless, she staggered¹¹ out and leaned on the side of the doorway. 'Open the gates,' he ordered. afterwards, turning to those of his men who were inside, he gave them leave to depart to their homes. 'For how long, Tuan?' asked one of them timidly. 'For all life,' he said, in a sombre tone.

"A hush¹² had fallen upon the town after the outburst of wailing and lamentation that had swept over the river, like a gust of wind from the opened abode of sorrow. But rumours flew in whispers, filling the hearts with consternation and horrible doubts. The robbers were coming back, bringing many others with them, in a great ship, and there would be no refuge in the land for any one. A sense of utter insecurity as during an earthquake pervaded the minds of men, who whispered their suspicions, looking at each other as if in the presence of some awful portent¹³.

"The sun was sinking towards the forests when Dain Waris's body was brought into Doramin's campong. Four men carried it in, covered decently with a white sheet which the old mother had sent out down to the gate to meet her son on his return. They laid him at Doramin's feet, and the old man sat still for a long time, one hand on each knee, looking down. The fronds¹⁴ of palms swayed gently, and the foliage of fruit-trees stirred above his head. Every single man of his people was there, fully armed, when the old nakhoda at last raised his eyes. He moved them slowly over the crowd, as if seeking for a missing face. Again his chin sank on his breast. The whispers of many men mingled with the slight rustling of the leaves.

"The Malay who had brought Tamb' Itam and the girl to Samarang was there, too. 'Not so angry as many,' he said to me, but

¹¹ **stag•ger** / 'stægə / *v.* [intransitive always + adverb/preposition] to walk or move unsteadily, almost falling over

¹² **hush** / hʌʃ / *n.* [singular] a period of silence, especially when people are expecting something to happen.

¹³ **por•tent** / 'pɔ:tent / *n.* [countable] a sign or warning that something is going to happen.

¹⁴ **frond** / frɒnd \$ fra:nd / *n.* [countable] a leaf of a FERN or PALM.

struck with a great awe and wonder at the 'suddenness of men's fate, which hangs over their heads like a cloud charged with thunder.' He told me that when Dain Waris's body was uncovered at a sign of Doramin's, he whom they often called the white lord's friend was disclosed lying unchanged with his eyelids a little open as if about to wake. Doramin leaned forward a little more, like one looking for something fallen on the ground. His eyes searched the body from its feet to its head, for the wound maybe. It was in the forehead and small; and there was no word spoken while one of the bystanders, stooping, took off the silver ring from the cold stiff hand. In silence he held it up before Doramin. A murmur of dismay and horror ran through the crowd at the sight of that familiar token. The old nakhoda stared at it, and suddenly let out one great fierce cry, deep from the chest, a roar of pain and fury, as mighty as the bellow of a wounded bull, bringing great fear into men's hearts, by the magnitude of his anger and his sorrow that could be plainly discerned without words. There was a great stillness afterwards for a space, while the body was being borne aside by four men. They laid it down under a tree, and on the instant, with one long shriek¹⁵, all the women of the household began to wail¹⁶ together; they mourned with shrill¹⁷ cries; the sun was setting, and in the intervals of screamed lamentations the high singsong voices of two old men intoning the Koran chanted¹⁸ alone.

"About this time Jim, leaning on a gun-carriage, looked at the river, and turned his back on the house; and the girl, in the doorway, panting as if she had run herself to a standstill, was looking at him across the yard. Tamb' Itam stood not far from his master, waiting patiently for what might happen. All at once Jim, who seemed to be lost in quiet thought, turned to him and said, 'Time to finish this.'

¹⁵ **shriek** / ʃri:k / *n.* [countable] a loud high sound made because you are frightened, excited, angry etc..

¹⁶ **wail** / weɪl / *v.* [intransitive] to cry out with a long high sound, especially because you are very sad or in pain.

¹⁷ **shrill** / ʃrɪl / *adj.* a shrill sound is very high and unpleasant.

¹⁸ **chant** / tʃɑ:nt \$ tʃænt / *v.* [intransitive and transitive] to sing or say a religious song or prayer in a way that involves using only one note or TONE.