

## Asynchronous-Reading and response

**In this scene a husband and his wife have arrived at an agricultural country fair. Just prior to this extract, during an auction for horses, the husband (who has been drinking too much) moans loudly about his wife and the auctioneer offers – initially jokingly – to auction her to the highest bidder. The husband agrees and the following events occur.**

The auctioneer selling the old horses in the field outside could be heard saying, “Now this is the last lot — now who’ll take the last lot for a song? Shall I say forty shillings? ’Tis a very promising broodmare, a trifle over five years old, and nothing the matter with the hoss at all, except that she’s a little holler in the back and had her left eye knocked out by the kick of another, her own sister, coming along the road.”

“I don’t see why men who have got wives and don’t want ‘em, shouldn’t get rid of ‘em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses,” said the man in the tent. “Why, I’d sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her! The woman is no good to me. Who’ll have her? Will any Jack Rag or Tom Straw among ye buy my goods? Stand up, Susan, and show yourself.”

The woman looked on the ground, as if she maintained her position by a supreme effort of will.

“Five guineas, or she’ll be withdrawn. Do anybody give it? Yes or no?”

“Yes,” said a loud voice from the doorway.

All eyes were turned. Standing in the triangular opening which formed the door of the tent was a sailor, who, unobserved by the rest, had arrived there within the last two or three minutes. A dead silence followed his affirmation.

“You say you do?” asked the husband, staring at him. “Saying is one thing, and paying is another. Where’s the money?”

The sailor hesitated a moment, looked anew at the woman, came in, unfolded five crisp pieces of paper, and threw them down upon the tablecloth. They were Bank-of-England notes for five pounds. Upon the face of this he clinked down the shillings severally — one, two, three, four, five.

“Now,” said the woman, breaking the silence, so that her low dry voice sounded quite loud, “before you go further, Michael, listen to me. If you touch that money, I and this girl go with the man. Mind, it is a joke no longer.”

“A joke? Of course it is not a joke!” shouted her husband, his resentment rising at her suggestion. “I take the money; the sailor takes you. That’s plain enough.”

“Tis quite on the understanding that the young woman is willing,” said the sailor. “I wouldn’t hurt her feelings for the world.”

“Faith, nor I,” said her husband. “But she is willing, provided she can have the child. She said so only the other day when I talked o’t!”

“That you swear?” said the sailor to her.

“I do,” said she, after glancing at her husband’s face and seeing no repentance there.

“Very well, she shall have the child, and the bargain’s complete,” said the trusser. He took the sailor’s notes and deliberately folded them, and put them with the shillings in a high remote pocket, with an air of finality.

1. What does the man complain about when he gets drunk?
2. What is the relationship between Susan and Michael?
  - (a) Resentful from both sides.
  - (b) Indifferent since they are an arranged marriage.
  - (c) Loving from Susan to Michael, but Michael detests Susan.
  - (d) Happy and content.
3. ‘The woman looked on the ground, as if she maintained her position by a supreme effort of will.’ How do you think the writer attempts to create sympathy for the woman?
4. Read the opening phrase from the auctioneer “Five guineas or she’ll be withdrawn.” What does this reveal about the position of women?
5. ‘A dead silence followed his affirmation.’ What does the phrase dead silence imply?
6. How would you describe the way the husband speaks to the sailor regarding the sale of his wife? What does this suggest about his attitude?
7. Look at the dialogue from the wife, “Now,” said the woman.” What might her reaction reveal about her feelings towards her husband?
8. I take the money; the sailor takes you. Explain the effect of the use of the semi-colon in this sentence.
9. Re-read this sentence.

“I do,” said she, after glancing at her husband’s face and seeing no repentance there.

How does the structure of this sentence emphasise the drama of the situation?

