“Yours” Feedback

This realistic narrative privileges the idea that love is a positive force that knows no boundaries, particularly the artificial boundary of age difference. Clark and Allison have been married for four months, though he is seventy-eight and she is thirty-five, against the wishes of Clark’s family, who think Allison is deceiving Clark. The couple demonstrate their love and kindness towards one another in the carving of Halloween pumpkins which are sometimes said to ward off evil spirits. Each assures the other that theirs is the best carving. Here love is not overly romantic; it is the love of mutual support and companionship even under the most trying and tragic conditions of Allison’s terminal condition. The narrative also positions the reader to accept the inevitability of human mortality.

The pair show mutual concern and respect for one another in this gentle life and death battle, even though Allison’s youth is starkly contrasted to Clark’s age in the central binary underpinning the narrative’s structure. Clark is represented through visual imagery as wearing “*a tan woollen shawl*” as he sits in “*a cushioned glider*” and his feet are “*slippered”*, suggesting old age. This is in comparison to Alison who wears *“bright dyed denims*” and “*volunteered afternoons at the childcare centre*”. Here characterization of Allison’s vibrant personality and caring nature are contrasted to the hateful attitude of the “*married daughter*” who ironically accuses her father emotively of being “*cruelly deceived*”, “*an old fool*” and who signs an uncashable cheque “*Jesus H. Christ*”, a form of American blasphemy. The daughter’s uncharitable sentiments are contradicted when it is revealed that Allison is dying of cancer, which is foreshadowed through the description of her “*natural hair wig*”. She has no ulterior motive other than love in wedding Clark. Her dedication to Clark and her calm demeanor spark the reader’s admiration for her kindness and bravery.

The lovingly intimate and accepting speech and actions of the couple are described by a narrating persona who is like a nearby onlooker, but one who is also privy to Clark’s thoughts in the narrative’s denouement. The story is thus narrated from a third person limited point of view with some internal focalisation on Clark who wanted to reassure Allison of her worth “*from the greater perspective he had*” before her death. The narrative structure is reasonably flat as the main conflict is between a women and her mortality. The writing allows the reader to accept the notion of death through the use of personification, “*even the trees were unbothered*” that their leaves had fallen and blown away and the candles inevitably burn down to wax. The secondary conflict, between father and daughter, is given little importance as it does not seem to impact on the couple’s devotion to one another. The climax inevitably occurs with Allison’s feverish death described in the visual image of her kicking “*away the comforter*”. All Clark is left with is “*a clear view out back and down the porch"* as he telephones as he is now alone; only death could separate him from his wife. The reader is invited to believe that theirs was a great and enduring love, despite the brevity of the marriage and the great age difference and that they are accepting death with dignity.

Allison and Clarke’s tenderness for one another, within this love/hate binary, is symbolized through the carving of the pumpkins which takes place “*late, late into this night*” in an echo of Allison’s late stage of life. In further symbolic imagery suggesting imminent death, the neighbour’s lights are out across the ravine and most “*of the leaves had fallen and blown away*”; Allison is approaching the winter of her life. After they complete their companionable task, Clark tells Allison, in a pivotal stretch of dialogue, “*You’re jack-o-lanterns are much, much better than mine*”. He is seeking to reassure her that she has worth, that she is cherished, in the only way he knows. Allison humbly denies the superiority of her pumpkins in acknowledgement of Clark’s skill; he has been an intern and a “*Sunday watercolor painter*” but he says, “*Look at me*” so he can repeat this meaningful and heartfelt praise. Allison assents but remarks, “*We are both exhausted. It’s good night time*.” There is further symbolism in Allison’s lighting of the “*vigil candle*s” within each carved pumpkin and with her ironic statement that she will let these burn down and “*put in new ones tomorrow*”, because in her bedroom “*she began to die*”. Clark’s pumpkins can also be seen to be carved into caricatures of the grief and healing process. Symbolism thus plays a significant role in enhancing the meaning and poignancy of the situation for the reader.

For Allison and Clark, love, devotion and the calm acceptance of mortality are the guiding ideologies of their existence. The reader is invited to believe that their lives have been enhanced through their unusual relationship; they are so sympathetic to one another, they even “*looked something alike*”. This love is in contrast to the ageist assumptions Clark’s family have made about the relationship which is expressed in an “*extremely unkind letter*” from Clark’s daughter that was both “*the worst thing*” and “*the funniest*”. The daughter’s ageist attitude is presumably based on the gold-digger archetype and is humorous in its crude assessment of what is a beautiful, mutually beneficial union. Ageism is turned on its head when it is revealed that it is the young wife who is physically weaker; a tactile image is powerfully used to point to her approaching death, “*Her pulse cords were fluttering under his fingers”*. Clark regrets that he has lost a final opportunity to assure Allison “*that she had missed nothing”* in not sharing “*a little talent, like his*” which was “*an awful plaguing thing*"*.* The mutually supportive discussion about the relative merits of the carved pumpkins is to be their last meaningful and loving communication; Clark is left with nothing but “*the jack-o-lanterns*” watching him.

**Points to note** –

* Romantic love can be viewed as an ideology with its attendant values, attitudes and beliefs.
* If you find it hard to identify an ideology underpinning the text or espoused by a character, consider the values, attitudes and beliefs which are apparent and write about them. This will help cover ideology. Try to be familiar with at least the more common ideologies like materialism, capitalism, feminism, hedonism, humanism, Christian etc See previous study sheets provided especially the last one on the links between ideology and cultural ideas.
* Be sure not to mix up the ideology of a character with the ideology underpinning the text. If you are positioned to dislike a character, then their ideology is unlikely to align with that of the text. If you are invited to feel sympathy or admiration for a character, their ideology may be closer to the overall ideology but there still might be differences. Here the loving attitudes of Clark and Alison does seem to echo the pro-love and kindness sentiment of the story. To avoid confusion, explain the ideologies of characters and text separately.
* If you don’t know what to put in the conclusion consider **interpreting the meaning of the title** – show its meaning I relation to you theme statement. You could also **analyse the end of the text or the resolution** if a narrative in the conclusion. How does the text end and what does this mean? How is the conflict resolved and what does this mean? You could also **refer to ideology** in the conclusion – sum up the main values, attitudes and beliefs **underpinning the text.**

Please email me if you have any questions or want feedback right up to the exam. I am here for you.

**See below for a slightly different reading of “Yours” and some more ideas**

The short, realistic narrative, “Yours” privileges the idea that human beings should accept their mortality with equanimity and grace. The story charts the last hours of a young wife’s life, foregrounding the love the couple have for one another through the symbolic act of carving Halloween pumpkins together. The narrative overturns cultural assumptions about a younger woman marrying a much older man by emphasizing the idea that love has not only greatly assisted in their acceptance of death, but has also overcome the age barrier. The ageist prejudices of a hateful daughter are almost irrelevant to the couple as they face the young wife’s last hours together. The ideology of stoicism in the face of death is coupled with the ideology of romantic love wherein each individual in the pair is greatly fortified by the love of the other in the face of great adversity.

A simpler version:

The realistic, romantic narrative “Yours” promotes the idea that human beings should face adversity and mortality with dignity and that such composure can be attained through the power of love. The married couple depicted are forced to face the imminent death of the young wife but are greatly supported by their love for one another. This mutual tenderness is symbolized in their late night carving of Halloween pumpkins and their praise of one another’s efforts. This enduring love has overcome the age barrier and the ageism of the old man’s daughter. Now it also allows them to faced terminal cancer with equanimity.

Main idea: human beings need to face mortality

Supporting ideas: the power of love allows humans to overcome adversity and to face death with equanimity; love has overcome the ageism of the daughter which is all but irrelevant to the married couple.

Having 2-3 ideas allows for them to be developed in body paragraphs. They all need to relate to the theme statement/main interpretation, though.

Hint – make the BIG idea, the universal idea the main one. E.g. human beings need to accept their mortality. You know, the one that applies to all humans.

Make the ideas that are more closely related to events in the story supporting ideas. e.g. overcoming ageist discrimination, the power of love to console and to strengthen