

## Cultural and Historical Significance

### *from The Mistress of Spices*

by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

I am a Mistress of Spices.

I can work the others too. Mineral, metal, earth and sand and stone. The gems with their cold clear light. The liquids that burn their hues into your eyes till you see nothing else. I learned them all on the island.

But the spices are my love.

I know their origins, and what their colors signify, and their smells. I can call each by the true-name it was given at the first, when earth split like skin and offered it up to the sky. Their heat runs in my blood. From *amchur* to *zafran*, they bow to my command. At a whisper they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magic powers.

Yes, they all hold magic, even the everyday American spices you toss unthinking into your cooking pot.

You doubt? Ah. You have forgotten the old secrets your mother's mothers knew. Here is one of them again: Vanilla beans soaked soft in goat's milk and rubbed on the wrist bone can guard against the evil eye. And here another: A measure of pepper at the foot of the bed, shaped into a crescent, cures you of nightmare.

But the spices of true power are from my birth land, land of ardent poetry, aquamarine feathers. Sunset skies brilliant as blood. They are the ones I work with.

If you stand in the center of this room and turn slowly around, you will be looking at every Indian spice that ever was—even the lost ones—gathered here upon the shelves of my store.

I think I do not exaggerate when I say there is no other place in the world quite like this.

1. The speaker in this passage has moved from India to America. This passage shows that she

- A. is trying to maintain her cultural identity.
- B. doesn't remember her nation fondly.
- C. is facing a severe crisis of identity.
- D. has adopted an American way of life.

### *from The Scarlet Letter*

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

"Mercy on us, goodwife," exclaimed a man in the crowd, "is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows? That is the hardest word yet! Hush, now, gossips! for the lock is turning in the prison-door, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself."

The door of the jail being flung open from within, there appeared, in the first place, like a black shadow emerging into sunshine, the grim and grisly presence of the town-beadle, with a sword by his side, and his staff of office in his hand. This personage prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender. Stretching forth the official staff in his left hand, he laid his right upon the shoulder of a young woman, whom he thus drew forward; until, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air, as if by her own free will. She bore in her arms a child, a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day; because its existence, heretofore, had brought it acquainted only with the gray twilight of a dungeon, or other darksome apartment of the prison.

When the young woman—the mother of this child—stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbors. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A.

Nathaniel Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850. The story, however, is set in seventeenth-century Colonial New England, approximately two hundred years before Hawthorne's time. Hawthorne's attraction to this time period was certainly influenced by the fact that his ancestors were Puritans; in fact, one of his forefathers was Judge Hawthorne, one of the men who presided over the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692. Despite his lineage and connection to this period, Hawthorne was exceptionally critical of the Puritans and their moral rigidity. Their intolerance for human frailty and nature disturbed him. One might think that Hawthorne wanted to atone for the offenses of his ancestors by writing *The Scarlet Letter*. This novel, which is often categorized as a historical romance, explores the issues that plague this overly oppressive society.

2. Considering both the historical commentary and the excerpt, which of the following best explains how Mistress Prynne is characterized in *The Scarlet Letter*?

- A. She is portrayed negatively, as someone who deserves her punishment.
- B. She is portrayed sympathetically, as someone who has been wronged.
- C. She is portrayed morally, as someone who scorns the weakness of others.
- D. She is portrayed unfavorably, as someone who is a product of her time.

3. The plot of *The Scarlet Letter* is concerned with the

- A. unforgiving society of seventeenth-century Puritans.
- B. social aftermath of the Revolutionary War.
- C. customs of nineteenth-century Victorian society.
- D. historical struggle for women's equality.

The Transcendentalism movement in America was impacted by the 1854 book *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau. *Walden* is a journal Thoreau wrote during his stay at Concord's Walden Pond. The book emphasized the importance of nature and how even the most ordinary of objects can be extraordinary. As he put his thoughts to paper, many around him during that time were leaving the serenity of nature and rural areas to join the work force in urban areas as the age of industry bore down on America.

Thoreau's visit to Walden Pond led him to say that he stayed at Walden Pond "because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life." His stay allowed him to ponder about the distractions many Americans have in their daily lives. He came to the conclusion that business, material possessions, and success actually hindered most people and kept them from experiencing what life truly had to offer. His beliefs still resonate today with many; likewise, Walden Pond is still a popular area of reflection. However, the areas that surround Walden Pond have become a hot spot for developers.

4. What historical trend was Thoreau opposing when he went to the woods to write *Walden*?

- A. increased awareness of the health of the environment
- B. people working in factories instead of farms
- C. women gaining the right to vote in elections
- D. extreme patriotism resulting in conflicts between countries

### **My Sioux Pride**

From the Trail of Tears  
To the tale of the Wounded Knee  
I have lived the history of my elders

The age-old, silent fears

I look toward the sky  
And the earth that is always mine  
All is not lost, I remember  
We can be us and shine

My braided, parted hair  
And wooden flute will sing  
Till the soil will grow new plants  
Oh, let the music ring

5. Based on this poem, Native Americans

- A. have a close-knit family.
- B. respect independence.
- C. lack an affinity for music.
- D. feel close to nature.

*from "Tai-Pan"*  
by James Clavell

Brock stared down at him. "Hong Kong's got no future. It's open ports on the China mainland we be needing, and you knowed it, by God!"

"The harbor's the best in these waters," Cooper said. "Plenty of room to careen and refit all our ships. Plenty of room to build our homes and warehouses. And no Chinese interference at long last."

"A colony's got to have arable land and peasants to work the land, Mr. Cooper. An' revenue," Brock said impatiently. "I be walking all over and so have you. Not a crop'll grow here. There be no fields or streams, no grazing land. So no meat and no spuds. Everything we be needing'll have to come by sea. Think of the cost. Why, even the fishing be rotten. An' who's to pay upkeep of Hong Kong, eh? Us and our trade, by God!"

"Oh, that's the sort of colony you want, Mr. Brock?" Cooper said. "I thought the British Empire"—he spat deftly to windward—"had enough of that sort of colony."

Brock's hand strayed near his knife. "Be you spitting to clear yor throat, or spitting on the Empire?" Tyler Brock was nearing fifty, a big, one-eyed man as hard and as permanent as the iron he had been forced to peddle in Liverpool as a youth, and as strong and as dangerous as the fighting merchant ships he had escaped to and at length had come to rule as head of Brock and Sons. His clothes were rich and the knife at his belt was jeweled. His beard was graying like his hair.

"It's a cold day, Mr. Brock," Tillman said quickly, inwardly angry at his young partner's loose tongue. Brock was no man to bait, and they could not afford open enmity with him yet. "Plenty of chill on the wind, eh, Jeff?" Cooper nodded briefly. But he did not take his eyes off Brock. He had no knife, but there was a derringer in his pocket. He was of a height with Brock but slighter, and unafraid.

"I be givin' thee piece of advice, Mr. Cooper," Brock said. "Best not spit too often after saying 'British Empire.'"

6. What does this excerpt teach readers about the British cultural history?

- A. The British Empire was an important part of the British identity.
- B. The British had little exposure to and influence on South Asia.
- C. The diversity in England was a result of its historical colonization

D. The culture of England was based on its trade with Hong Kong.

### The Story of a Forgotten People

Dilmaya's limp body moved along the direction of the truck's motion. At 85, she had never thought she would be stateless and wandering between borders. She had left Bhutan, her homeland, days ago. After India did not want them, they were now headed to Nepal as refugees. In the darkness of the night, everyone in the crowded truck looked the same. No one could see Dilmaya's wrinkles, squinting eyes, or stooped back. Silence reigned for a long time. Dilmaya knew that the first person to speak would be a youth under 20. Sure enough, a young boy of about 16 spoke in a voice that reflected both anger and sorrow.

"Well, I hope it is better than being refugee in your own country," the boy yelled. "There were more of us than the army. Why did we silently get on the truck? Why didn't we ever stop them?"

"Hush, boy," an older man spoke. "Let us sleep. We haven't slept a wink for ages."

"Yes. Sleep away. Sleep when they force us to sign these forms of migration. Sleep when the Drukpa demolish our schools and burn our books. Sleep through their killing of our mother tongue! Stay put when they tell us we are not Bhutanese," the boy sounded angrier than sad now. "Just let the monsters do whatever they want."

While the young boy was inspiring people to rise against the government's injustice, Dilmaya kept thinking of the Bhutan she always loved. Till this day, the only way she could fall asleep was by picturing green grass as far as eyes could see, the terraced paddy fields, the plentiful trees, and the farmers singing and working in peace. She was born into the peacefulness of farming and wished she could go back to her little hut to die. Her father, a Nepali-speaker, had been brought to Bhutan with many others of his kind because the Drukpa couldn't farm. Like him, many farmers had become citizens of this beautiful land. He had died a happy man giving everything to the country he loved.

Dilmaya also remembered the little Drukpa boy she used to babysit before the segregation. He used to call her "mother." That was when she had believed that all people were basically the same. That was before 1985. For now, she kept thinking of everything beautiful she had seen in life to keep going. The young boy kept on talking, and Dilmaya kept on moving along with the truck.

7. Read this sentence from the story.

That was when she had believed that all people were basically the same.

Which of these best describes the significance of this sentence?

- A. It describes the differences among the Drukpa people in Bhutan.
- B. It reflects the importance of farming in the history of Bhutan.
- C. It shows that the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese love Nepal.
- D. It implies that the segregation in Bhutan was enforced brutally.

*from* **Passage to India**  
by Walt Whitman

How should I think—how breathe a single breath—how speak—if, out of myself,  
I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,  
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me,  
And lo! thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full, the vastnesses of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,

Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth;  
—What love, than thine and ours could wider amplify?  
What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours, O soul?  
What dreams of the ideal? what plans of purity, perfection, strength?  
What cheerful willingness, for others' sake, to give up all?  
For others' sake to suffer all?

8. How does this poem reflect the movement of Transcendentalism?
- A. The speaker has a pure faith-based belief of the universe taught by a specific religion.
  - B. The speaker pursues thoughts about religion and nature from an individual perspective.
  - C. The speaker shows little interest in the philosophical meanings beyond the natural world.
  - D. The speaker has a strict scientific understanding of the universe with no room for interpretation.
9. What poetic form does Whitman use in this poem?
- A. free verse
  - B. ballad
  - C. villanelle
  - D. sonnet

*from* **The Lay Preacher**  
by Joseph Dennie  
1795

In a walk, so wide, and various, the pondering preacher, perhaps, can moralize upon the shifting scenes, more profitably, aye, and more pleasantly too, than a more heedless pedestrian. He, who sallies out for the express purpose of speculation and remark, with his scrutinizing spectacles on, and "with a patient ear," can note and describe, with greater accuracy, than the individual, who is cramped with the crowd, or who, engrossed by some worldly care, is hurrying onward to his object.

I have long been of opinion, that if I could traverse the market place, visit the mart, lounge at the coffee-houses, and, explore, in the homely phrase of Sancho, "every creek and corner" of a great city, that I could profitably compose a little essay, and tell, occasionally, what I had seen and heard. With this opportunity, eagerly sought, and long denied, I am now indulged. In the metropolis of my country, I have found a sort of parsonage, which has been my shelter for more than a year. Having had time to visit many of my new parishioners, to compose my cares, and put my study in order, I have thought it expedient to shake off sluggishness, to rouse from the dreams of abstraction, and to resolve, as it seems Solomon, in my text, has done before me, to rise now, and go about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways.

10. Which structure of nonfiction did the author use?
- A. essay
  - B. letter
  - C. journal
  - D. speech