

Register Number:

Date:

**ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE – 27**

**VI SEMESTER EJP--END SEMESTER EXAMINATION: APRIL 2019**

**JN 6313 - Arts & Culture Journalism**

**Time- 2 ½ HOURS Max Marks- 70**

**Instructions:**

1. **This paper has THREE SECTIONS and FOUR printed pages.**
2. **This paper is for the VI Semester Journalism students who have opted for the Arts & Culture Elective.**
3. **You are allowed to use a dictionary.**
4. **Read the following review of Yukiko Motoya’s ‘The Lonesome Bodybuilder’ by Katy Waldman and answer the questions.**

**The Chills and Moods of Yukiko Motoya’s Quietly Radical Stories**

Many unusual things happen in “The Lonesome Bodybuilder,” a new collection by the Japanese author Yukiko Motoya. Men and women enter into romances with shape-shifters. A woman trains as a bodybuilder, adding massive ropes of muscle to her back and shoulders, tripling the width of her neck—and her husband doesn’t notice. A sales associate at a boutique stays overnight digging up outfits for someone—or something—that won’t leave the dressing room. (“I want you to come out of that fitting room with a smile on your face!” the attendant chirps, noting the “slurping, roiling kind of sound” emanating from behind the curtain.) The stories are funny and creepy; they have a campfire vibe, a brush of the moonless night. (Several tales allude to “Kwaidan,” a ghoulish anthology compiled by the folklorist Lafcadio Hearn, in 1904.)

In “The Lonesome Bodybuilder,” characters correctly identify weird behaviour as weird, but they mistake out-of-bounds, supernatural weird for human, “life’s a rich tapestry” weird. This normalization gives the stories their irony and their sense of being just a bit off, like a lingering scent of formaldehyde. The reader wonders: Am I the strange one?

Motoya’s characters tend to be housewives and service workers, and her tales revolve around intimate or faux-intimate relationships. The stories consider how it feels to take other people into account, to be forever calibrating your own words and actions in relation to those nearby.

One woman tries to compensate for her husband’s “lack of confidence by listing all my own faults.” A second character, an executive, wishes to speak her mind at a meeting but fears that she hasn’t established herself among her colleagues “as the kind of person who could say that sort of thing.” The tales boil down to the problem of balancing empathy with self-assertion—of both practicing kindness and expressing your own needs, and all while the people around you are behaving like wraiths or aliens.

Motoya’s protagonists feel quietly radical in a literary moment that seems particularly interested in unpacking various forms of narcissism. They treat the importance of others’ inner lives as a given.

But too much open-mindedness and empathy can become a kind of permeability, and that gets these characters into trouble. The collection’s longest story, “An Exotic Marriage,” centres on a woman who notices that her husband’s eyes and mouth are sliding around on his face. “You should be careful,” her neighbour tells her. “You’re accommodating, San, and before you know it”—she breaks off, as San’s features rearrange themselves to mirror her partner’s. Other women in the book pursue men who are made of straw or advise each other to marry bicycle saddles. (He “will no doubt be prepared to be swung as hard as it takes to protect your honour.”)

The husbands are oppressively thoughtless, moody, domineering. Lying on the couch, they prompt the “strange impression” of “a new kind of organism that would die if it exerted itself in any way.” There is acid in Motoya’s surrealism: these women will put up with anything! A draft blows through the tales—loneliness, the most spectral emotion. The executive who holds her tongue at the meeting also sees, or dreams that she sees, faces in inanimate objects; she suffers from a condition called pareidolia, in which the mind perceives illusory patterns in random stimuli. She is typical of Motoya’s women: conferring an excess of personhood on whomever or whatever is at hand, yearning to connect to something that isn’t there.

At first, “The Lonesome Bodybuilder” appears most interested in chills and moods; I needed time for its feminism and its political threads to catch the light. In “How to Burden the Girl,” a thirty-four-year-old recluse spies on the younger woman who has moved in next door. She has glimmering pink hair, she’s an unstoppable ninja, she fights bad guys in the garden every day.

The narrator, reasoning that “she must be lonely, what with her entire family having been killed by an evil gang,” asks her out, only to find that his new girlfriend is psychotic and in love with her dad. In “The Women,” a city’s female population contracts a virus that turns them into homicidal hotties. It’s sadder—more bruising—than a revenge fantasy. “We have to accept that we’re responsible for the physical effects they’re experiencing!” a man yells, as the narrator’s girlfriend’s lips produce their own lipstick; the narrator tearfully euthanizes her. “Q&A,” which is presented as the deathbed ravings of a beauty columnist, is a meta delirium of tips, call-backs to previous stories, and rage.

There is something pareidolic (Pareidolia is the tendency to interpret a vague stimulus as something known to the observer, such as seeing shapes in clouds, seeing faces in inanimate objects or abstract patterns, or hearing hidden messages in music) about the writing process. The author reaches, with language, toward a reader who may or may not be there. Motoya’s book beguiles with its reversals: the bodybuilder’s husband may be unobservant to the point of eeriness, but, as it turns out, she is the shape-shifter, the trickster.

The same goes for San, whose face melts into new patterns. Malleability can imply a woman’s weakness, or it can imply power. Some changes render you, paradoxically, more yourself. (That may be an additional appeal of the gym: in a precarious world, a weight lifter looks exactly like what she is.) Meanwhile, the reader watches each transformation and stab at connection. She becomes the bulge in the curtain, the shadow on the other side of the glass—the strange one.

**I.A Answer ANY TWO of the following questions in 150 words each. (2x15=30)**

1. What connection can the reader draw between the first and last paragraphs of this essay? How do the examples offered by the writer fit the connection?
2. Based on the characters from the book that the reviewer mentions – what do you make of ‘She is typical of Motoya’s women: conferring an excess of personhood on whomever or whatever is at hand, yearning to connect to something that isn’t there’?
3. Is the review able to open out the book to the reader? Explain.
4. **Read the following excerpt from an interview of Griffin Dunne from The Guardian.**

Part of Didion’s eternal appeal, Dunne explains, is how inviting her writing is, a quality that manifests itself in pieces like *The White Album* and *On Self-Respect*, where it often seems like she’s working her thoughts out on the page, delicately spinning a web of whimsical prose and shrewd reporting. In the documentary, though, Didion, now 82, keeps her answers short and sweet, exhibiting an economy of language readers will recognize from her work. “No one is going to accuse her of being a chatterbox,” he jokes. “She would answer sometimes with three words and then sit there in silence. I’ve grown to become comfortable in those silences because she is. When she’s finished saying what she wanted to say, she’s done.”

**I.B Answer the following questions in 100- 150 words. (2x10=20)**

1. Do Joan Didion’s silences make their way into her writing as well? Give examples from your reading of her work this semester.
2. Write about a moment from the film ‘The Centre Cannot Hold’ that you found interesting. Explain why.
3. **Read this excerpt from a New York Times interview of Clifford Geertz by David Berreby.**

Social scientists less sympathetic to the literary spirit saw Geertz as a presiding spirit of nihilism. A typical attack from the hard-core social scientists was that Geertz has encouraged the "metatwaddle" of a fashionable relativism: the idea that every culture's practices, from child sacrifice to clitoridectomy to mutilation for thieves, must get equal respect. "Look, I think clitoridectomy is a horrible business," Geertz says.

"But what are we going to do? Invade the Horn of Africa and arrest everybody? If you're serious about addressing this, you ask people there about the practice and you listen to them. You listen to women from there who justify the practice. You want to change things, you don't start by proclaiming that you possess the truth. That's not very helpful.

Understanding what people think doesn't mean you have to think the same thing. You don't just say 'whatever you do is fine.' Just saying 'it's their culture' doesn't legitimize everything.

To be open to dialogue with other people doesn't mean you don't have any values of your own. I hold democratic values, but I have to recognize that a lot of other people don't hold them. So, it doesn't help much to say, 'This is the truth.' That doesn't mean I don't believe anything.

The challenge is to find a way to keep one's values and identity while living with other values -- values you can neither destroy nor approve. You can't assert yourself in the world as if nobody else was there. Because this isn't a clash of ideas. There are people attached to those ideas. If you want to live without violence, you have to realize that other people are as real as you are.

**I.C Answer the following question in 250 words. (20 marks)**

1. What can young journalists aspiring to ‘change the world’ learn from this passage?

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