

## The Jewel in the Crown by Paul Scott (1966)

### Discussion

- The Temeraire was an old warship which had taken part in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. By 1838 she was old-fashioned and was taken up the Thames to be broken up. This painting is often thought to be a symbolic one; if so, what is Turner trying to say, and how does he achieve his effect?
- Do you know of any other famous paintings that have a special significance or symbolic interpretation?

### The Novel

The story is set in India in 1942, during the Second World War and five years before India's independence. In the novel, Scott explores British and Indian attitudes and feelings, especially in the character of Hari Kumar, who is an Indian with an English upbringing, and who is falsely accused of attacking an English girl, Daphne Manners. The opening of the novel centres around another character. Miss Crane, who is an elderly, unmarried lady who teaches at the mission school intended to educate local children in the Christian religion. Miss Crane, having stood up to some rioters who attempted to enter the school, has reluctantly become a kind of heroine, and has decided to ask her superior, Mr Cleghorn, for a transfer to another school. On leaving, she is given a painting which has a special meaning for her.

When Mr. Cleghorn returned from leave, anxious for news of what he had only heard as rumour, she decided to apply for a transfer so that she could get on with her job without constant reminders of what she thought of as her false position. She told Mr. Cleghorn that it was quite impossible to teach children who, facing her, saw her as a cardboard heroine and no doubt had, each of them, only one eye on the blackboard because the other was fixed on the doorway, expectant of some further disturbance they wanted her to quell. Mr. Cleghorn said that he would be sorry to see her go, but that he quite understood and that if she really meant what she said he would write personally to mission headquarters to explain matters.

When the instructions for her transfer came she discovered that she had been promoted by being put in sole charge of the school at Ranpur. Before she left there was a tea, and then the presentation of the picture – a larger, more handsomely framed copy of the picture on the wall behind her desk in the Muzaffirabad schoolroom, a semi-historical, semi-allegorical picture entitled *The Jewel in Her Crown*, which showed the old Queen (whose image the children now no doubt confused with the person of Miss Crane) surrounded by representative figures of her Indian Empire: Princes, landowners, merchants, money-lenders, sepoy, farmers, servants, children, mothers, and remarkably clean and tidy beggars. The Queen was sitting on a golden throne, under a crimson canopy, attended by her temporal and spiritual aides: soldiers, statesmen and clergy. The canopied throne was apparently in the open air because there were palm trees and a sky showing a radiant sun bursting out of bulgy clouds such as, in India, heralded the wet monsoon. Above the clouds flew the prayerful figures of the angels who were the benevolent spectators of the scene below. Among the statesmen who stood behind the throne one was painted in the likeness of Mr. Disraeli holding up a parchment map of India to which he pointed with obvious pride but tactful humility. An Indian prince, attended by native servants, was approaching the throne bearing a velvet cushion on which he offered a large and sparkling gem. The children in the school thought that this gem was the jewel referred to in the title. Miss Crane had been bound to explain that the gem was simply representative of tribute, and that the jewel of the title was India herself - which had been transferred from the rule of the British East India Company to the rule of the British crown in 1858, the year after the Mutiny when the sepoy in the service of the Company (that first set foot in India in the seventeenth century) had risen in rebellion, and attempts had been made to declare an old moghul prince king in Delhi, and that the picture had been painted after 1877, the year in which Victoria was persuaded by Mr. Disraeli to adopt the title Empress of India.

*The Jewel in Her Crown* was a picture about which Miss Crane had very mixed feelings. The copy that already hung on the classroom wall in Muzaffirabad when she first went there as assistant to Mr. Cleghorn she found useful when teaching the English language to a class of Muslim and Hindu children. This is the Queen. That is her crown. The sky there is blue. Here there are clouds in the sky. The uniform of the sahib is scarlet. Mr. Cleghorn, an ordained member of the Church and an enthusiastic amateur scholar of archaeology and anthropology, and much concerned with the impending, never-got-down-to

composition of a monograph on local topography and social customs, had devoted most of his time to work for the Church and for the older boys in the middle school. He did this at the expense of the junior school, as he was aware. When Miss Crane was sent to him from Lahore in response to his requests for more permanent help in that field of his responsibility he had been fascinated to notice the practical use she made of a picture which, to him, had never been more than something hanging on the wall to brighten things up.

He was fond of remarking on it, whenever he found her in class with half a dozen wide-eyed children gathered round her, looking from her to the picture as she took them through its various aspects, step by step. "Ah, the picture again, Miss Crane," he would say, "admirable, admirable. I should never have thought of it. To teach English and at the same time love of the English."

She knew what he meant by love of the English. He meant love of their justice, love of their benevolence, love — anyway — of their good intentions. As often as she was irritated by his simplicity, she was touched by it. He was a good man: tireless, inquisitive, charitable. Mohammedanism and Hinduism, which still frightened her in their outward manifestations, merely amused him: as a grown man might be amused by the grim, colourful but harmless games of children. If there were times when she thought him heedless of the misery of men, she could not help knowing that in his own way he never forgot the glory of God. Mr. Cleghorn's view was that God was best served, best glorified, by the training and exercise of the intellect.

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sepoys (35): Indian soldiers under British discipline

moghul (37): an Indian emperor

sahib (45): a form of address used by Indians to European men (used here to mean an English officer)

#### Understanding and Appreciating

- 1 Explain, in your own words, why Miss Crane felt it 'impossible to teach' in her present position (line 4).
- 2 What was the surprising result of Miss Crane's application for a transfer? What is implied in the description of the beggars in the painting as 'remarkably clean and tidy' (lines 19-20)?
- 3 What is 'tactful' about the humility displayed by Mr Disraeli while pointing to the map of India in the painting (line 28)?
- 4 What practical use had Miss Crane made of the other copy of the painting?
- 5 Explain the phrase 'at the expense of', as used in line 50.
- 6 What is implied in the difference between 'benevolence' and 'good intentions' in line 61?
- 7 In what way might Mr Cleghorn have been 'heedless of the misery of men' (lines 66-67)?

#### Summary Writing

In a short paragraph of 60—80 words, explain (in your own words) how the painting is both 'semi-historical' and 'semi-allegorical' (lines 15—39).