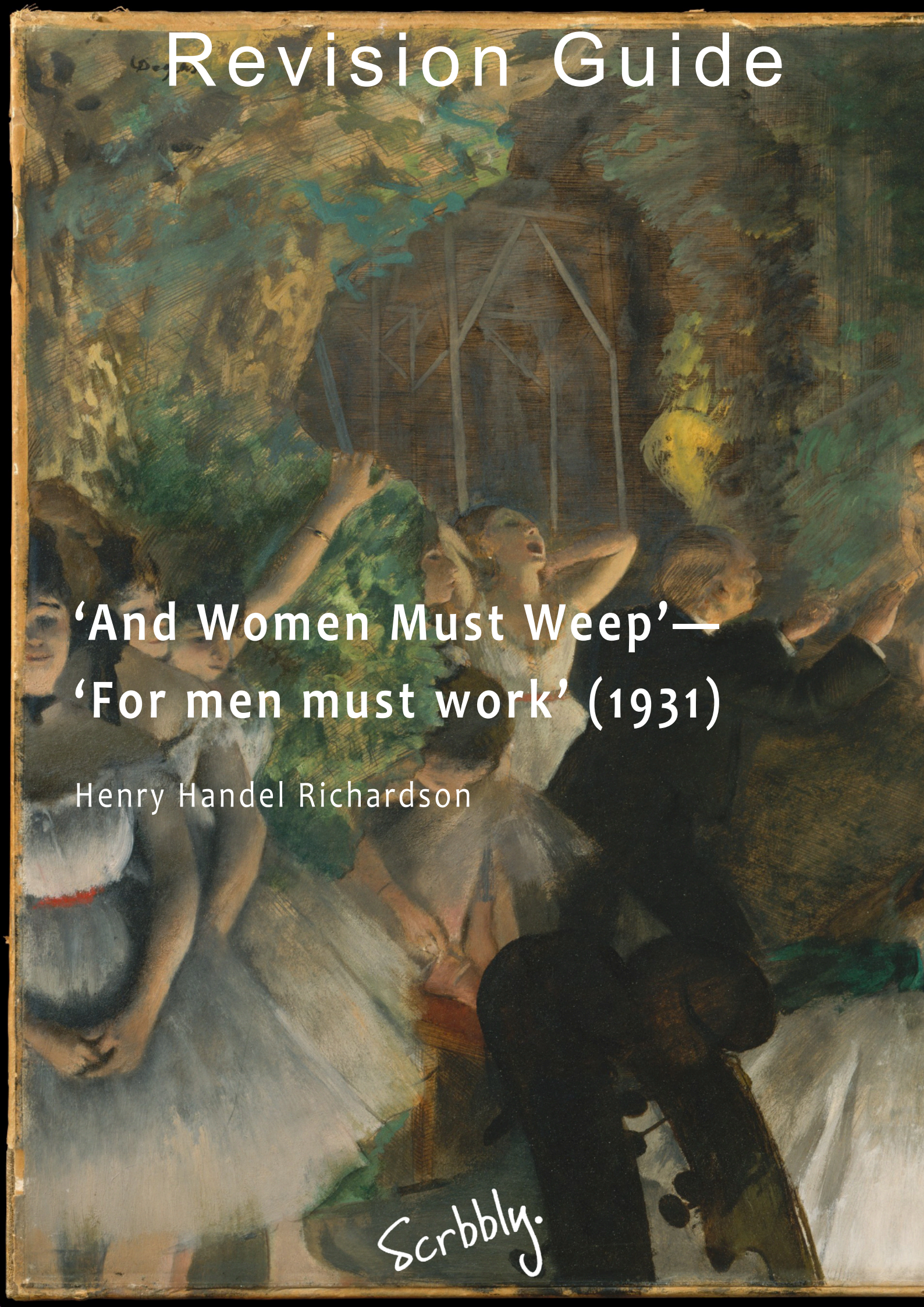


Revision Guide

‘And Women Must Weep’—
‘For men must work’ (1931)

Henry Handel Richardson

Scrbblly.

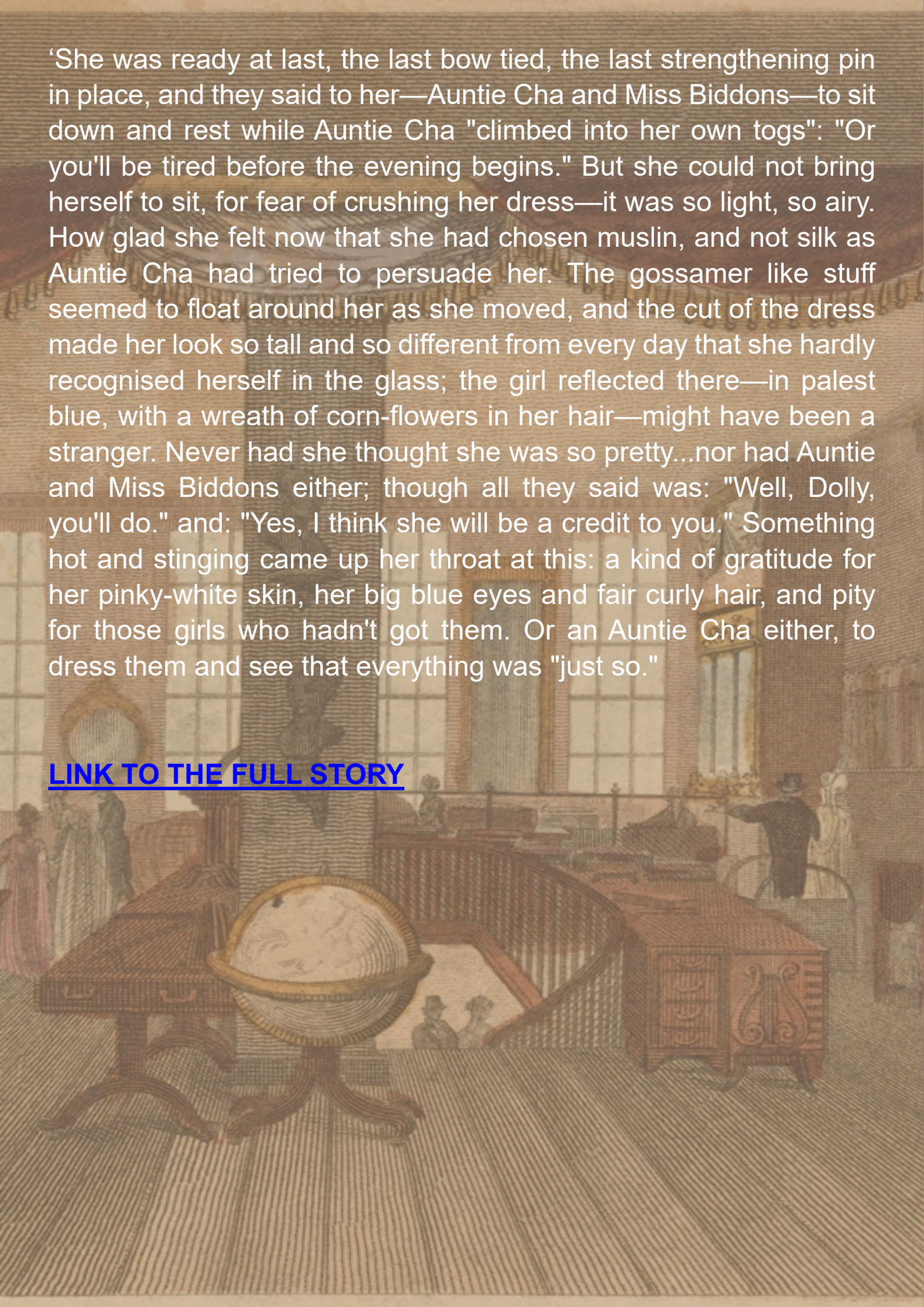




“...her face
driven deep into the pillow,
she cried
till she could cry
no more.”

‘She was ready at last, the last bow tied, the last strengthening pin in place, and they said to her—Auntie Cha and Miss Biddons—to sit down and rest while Auntie Cha "climbed into her own togs": "Or you'll be tired before the evening begins." But she could not bring herself to sit, for fear of crushing her dress—it was so light, so airy. How glad she felt now that she had chosen muslin, and not silk as Auntie Cha had tried to persuade her. The gossamer like stuff seemed to float around her as she moved, and the cut of the dress made her look so tall and so different from every day that she hardly recognised herself in the glass; the girl reflected there—in palest blue, with a wreath of corn-flowers in her hair—might have been a stranger. Never had she thought she was so pretty...nor had Auntie and Miss Biddons either; though all they said was: "Well, Dolly, you'll do." and: "Yes, I think she will be a credit to you." Something hot and stinging came up her throat at this: a kind of gratitude for her pinky-white skin, her big blue eyes and fair curly hair, and pity for those girls who hadn't got them. Or an Auntie Cha either, to dress them and see that everything was "just so."

[LINK TO THE FULL STORY](#)



VOCABULARY

Muslin: a soft, very thin material made of cotton - more delicate than silk

Gossamer: a fine and filmy material made up of cobwebs created by spiders and is most often observed in the fall. This word is also used as an adjective to describe the thin, webby texture of specific materials

Wreath: a collection of flowers, leaves, or stalks attached in a ring and used for adornment or setting on a grave. A wreath may be used for either purpose.

Waltz: a dance done in triple time by a couple who, as they go around the dance floor, revolve rhythmically round and round as a pair

Wagonette: a four-wheeled, horse-drawn recreational vehicle with crosswise-arranged front seats, one or two facing side seats, and is usually open

Flounces: sweeping movements up and down

Selvedge: an edge created on woven cloth during production to stop it from unravelling

Vexation: a feeling of irritability, frustration, or anxiety

Cloakroom: a space in a public facility where visitors may leave their outdoor clothing or bags

Fray: unravel or get worn around the edge, usually from repeated rubbing

Dowdy: unattractive and outdated in appearance

Snappily: in a succinct, intelligent, or humorous manner

Waddled: took short steps in a side to side swinging motion

Hornpipe: a lively dance usually done by one person, often associated with sailors

Oblige: make someone ethically, socially or legally forced to do an action

Grumpy: angry and short-tempered

Lanky: tall and skinny

Trod: to step

Muddle: throw into a chaotic or perplexed condition

Linger: remain longer than required since you don't want to go

Tashy: tattered and messy

Slur: to use a muddled tone of voice so that the sounds of the words flow into one another



TASK: Research debutante balls - make notes on what they are and how they used to function in society. Make sure to list the rules and customs associated with these kinds of balls.

CHARACTER LIST

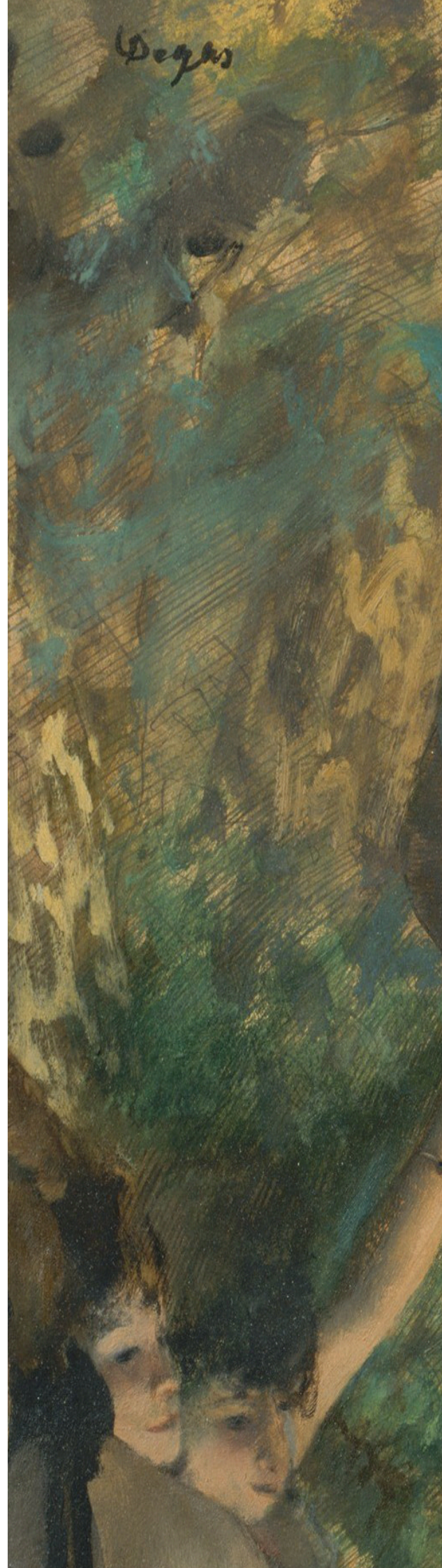
Dolly: The young and naive protagonist who goes to her first dance. At first, she is quite happy about the prospect of the ball - she enjoys dressing up and looking beautiful, as well as the choice of 'muslin' fabric for her cornflower blue dress. However, when she gets to the ball, her confidence ebbs away. She is told that she must earn the acceptance of gentlemen there by preserving social standards that make her feel awkward, fake and uncomfortable. She is advised to carve out a niche for herself, and effectively sell herself as an eligible wife to the young men - despite showing no signs of the confidence, or willingness, needed to partake in the event. Ultimately, she gets turned down at the ball and will have to bear the shame of failing to "attract the gentleman" with her for the rest of her life. Although she may marry later on, this is her first and therefore most exciting and nerve-wracking experience with romance and relationships - so the fact that it goes horribly wrong will likely knock her confidence for future potential suitors too.

Auntie Cha: Auntie Cha is a woman who cares for Dolly; she seems to be the primary instigator in encouraging Dolly to go to the ball. She has normal social values - which for the time include upholding the tradition of having the young women of her family attend a debutante ball in order to attract potential suitors. We could view her character as a **metaphor** for the pressures and restrictions that are imposed by society. She is controlling over Dolly's appearance and behaviour - including disagreeing with Dolly's decision to wear 'muslin' instead of 'silk' fabric - at first, this seems cruel and pushy. However, we can also view Auntie Cha as a kind character who just wants Dolly to have a good start in life by going through the marriage and social customs of her society. She is frustrated for Dolly when the ball starts to go wrong, but persists in trying to help her find a match. After the ball she seems genuinely upset and disappointed for Dolly, but also uses the news as a piece of gossip to talk about with her friends.

Auntie Cha's lady-friend's son: An unnamed gentleman who indirectly knows Auntie Cha and Dolly. He's at the ball with his fiancée, so he has no romantic interest in Dolly - but he dances with her anyway because he feels obligated to Auntie Cha to help her and her family out. This puts him in trouble with his fiancée, so he's distracted while dancing with Dolly because he keeps looking apologetically at his fiancée instead.

The Schoolboy: An unnamed gentleman who dances with Dolly towards the end of the ball - he is not quite a schoolboy, but so young that he almost looks as if he is still in school. He's clearly inexperienced and not yet looking for a proper marriage. He doesn't care if his hands are clammy and he dances awkwardly with Dolly, making a nuisance of himself by staring at another pretty girl the whole time. Dolly seems to take no comfort in his offer to dance, because he clearly is not directly interested in her at all - and even if he were, she has no interest in him.

Ms. Biddons: The woman waiting at home for the delivery of good news. She consoles Dolly's Aunt and provides her guidance on how to behave and present herself appropriately.



TASK: Why do you think the gentlemen in the story are unnamed and not well-defined characters? Explore your thoughts on this using evidence from the text to write a PEE paragraph that answers this question.



SETTING

The short story "And Women Must Weep" by Henry Handel Richardson is set in the early 20th century - although the precise location of the setting is unclear (Richardson was Australian, so we could imagine the setting being either Antipodean, American or English - it certainly depicts contemporary 'Western' marriage traditions rather than 'Eastern'). The story begins in Dolly's Aunt's house, where the protagonist is getting ready for an important event. She seems more gorgeous than ever before because she is dressed well - however, the setting around her is not deeply defined; the writer chooses instead to focus mostly on Dolly herself and the details of her ballgown and attire.

Secondly, the story switches focus to the local town hall, which is the location of the formal ball. The significance of this ball lies in the fact that it upholds a longstanding social tradition that has been present in upper class society since the 18th century: between the 1700s and early 1900s, eligible upper class women who came of age were expected to make their 'debut' in society by dressing up and attending these formal balls. These balls were always held in a public meeting place, such as a town hall or function room, and they were viewed as a way for young men and women to meet each other socially, and to make suitable matches in marriage. However, they also placed an immense amount of pressure upon these young people to succeed in finding a match - as shown in the story, if a woman (or man) left the ball without securing a partner, they were considered a social flop.

TASK: Have you ever been to a prom? Write your own experiences of attending a prom, as well as detailing the social pressures you felt on that evening. If you haven't been to a prom, imagine what it would be like and write about that instead.





PLOT SUMMARY

- Dolly, the main character, is preparing to start a new chapter of her life as the novel opens. She is attending a debutante ball, and 'coming out' into society as a mature girl, eligible for dating and marriage.
- She becomes fixated on weaving the fabric, observing how her look has altered as a consequence of her new clothing. She is excited at first, but Auntie Cha and Miss Biddons make her slightly worried - Miss Biddons warns her to not forget her steps in the waltz, and Auntie Cha is upset when Dolly accidentally tears a ribbon off of her dress.
- To be acceptable to her future mate, her Auntie Cha advises her to pretend to feel strongly about the men she interacts with. If the man does something wrong during the dance, he does not have to apologise; only her intentional error calls for an apology.
- She follows Auntie Cha's advice and sits in the front row expectantly, but she also realises that many of the debutantes are considerably prettier and better dressed than her. The males in the room continue to reject her, making her increasingly disheartened.
- Concerned, Auntie Cha fixes an encounter with her friend's son, who begrudgingly asks Dolly to dance. Though she is ashamed, Dolly accepts.
- She then dances with a man who is rude to her and humiliates her further. Though she sits back down and tries to smile at passing men, she has lost all confidence in the ball by this point.
- She dances again with Auntie Cha's friend's son, and a young boy, before going home.
- When they arrive home, Dolly shuts herself in her room, throws her dress in a heap on the floor and cries. Auntie Cha and Miss Biddons talk, and say that Dolly just simply "didn't take", i.e. she was not popular among the men.
- There is a sense that this failure will continue to haunt Dolly for the rest of her life, even though she realises that she didn't even want to be chosen at the ball.



NARRATIVE VOICE

Henry Handel Richardson's short tale "And Women Must Weep" is told in the **third person limited perspective**, which follows Dolly through the story, but also creates a sense of distance between the characters and reader - so we can remain objective in the situation. We are able to see Dolly's circumstances as a reflection of the wider social customs regarding Western courtship and marriage in the early 20th century. Though the same rigorous social practices are not usually required in modern times, this type of marriage custom had been commonplace for hundreds of years at the point of writing - any young woman from a middle or upper class family was expected to become a debutante, 'show' herself to the world at a ball, and be picked up by an eligible bachelor with a view to marriage. Richardson critiques this longstanding custom through her impersonal narrative voice, which encourages us to deeply sympathise with Dolly and her plight.

GENRE

This story fits within the **genre of social realism**, which uses specifically relatable lifelike situations to explore deeper issues that are inherent within social and political structures that underpin society as a whole. In this case, Dolly is a kind of **everywoman figure**, a young, normal girl who tries hard to follow the rules of her society and finds that she fails despite all of the effort that she puts in. We are encouraged, therefore, to infer that it is society itself which is at fault, rather than Dolly as an individual. Auntie Cha and Miss Biddons are also complicit in the social customs of their day - though they try to be helpful, everything they do in fact just supports the social system which has set Dolly up to fail in life. Instead of valuing her as an individual and trying to nurture her own interests and personal talents, they merely expect her to conform to the marriage and courtship customs of the day, whereby she is presented as a potential wife, alongside many other potential wives, and encouraged to compete socially for a husband. Richardson encourages her readers to think critically about this kind of social setup, which is not only disappointing for those who cannot partake in the customs of it, but also generally depersonalising - forcing both men and women to play set roles in society, rather than embracing their individual and unique selves.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“She was finally ready, the last bow tied, the last strengthening pin in place,”

This is the **opening** of the story. This statement shows that Dolly has been waiting for this day for a long time. She has been yearning so that maybe she can get her first suitor. This statement can also mean Dolly took significant time to get prepared.

“in palest blue, with a wreath of cornflowers in her hair.”

This quotation presents **symbolism**. Dolly's innocence is symbolised by the flowers she wears in her hair and her light blue outfit. This is because flowers are often associated with ideas around childlike innocence and blue, while often seen as a masculine colour in modern societies, has been seen as representative of female passivity in the past.

“Never had she thought she was so pretty.”

Dolly's insecurities are inherent in the text through the use of **free indirect discourse**, which reveals the protagonist's inner thoughts and feelings despite the use of third person. We learn that she has never been confident in her appearance. Her aunt is impressed with her beauty in this moment, but also it is ultimately revealed that it's still insufficient when compared with the other girls at the ball.

“But her heart was beating pit-a-pat. For this was her first real grown-up ball.”

Dolly's heart is beating at a higher rate because she is very anxious. She has never attended such an event, so she has no known experience with how things are supposed to be done. This is her first time, and it makes her very anxious. The use of **childish diction** in the phrase 'first real grown-up ball' creates a sense of **pathos** for Dolly, as we realise that she is still just a child and isn't really equipped to deal with maturity yet.

"Now mind you don't forget your steps in the waltz. One, two, together; four, five, six."

Ms. Biddons shows her experience in the waltz. She perfectly explains the steps, which shows confidence and knowledge compared to Dolly, who seems to fear and insecure with her moves in the dance. This also reveals the wider social customs that are at play in early 20th century society: it is not enough to just look pretty, as a debutante, there are many rules and formalities which must be upheld in order to signify one's social worth to eligible men. For instance, forgetting the correct steps of the waltz would be seen as a **social faux pas** (a socially undesirable behaviour) and thereby reduce a debutante's appeal or potential for marriage.

"Men, looking so splendid in their white shirt fronts, would walk across the floor and seem to be coming...and then it was always not her."


This presents the theme of rejection. Even though she had prepared herself well, men passed her and picked other ladies. This act made Dolly feel rejected by men, and she could not attract gentlemen. The sense of **bathos** (anticlimax) in the phrase 'and then it was always not her' creates a disappointing and **depressive mood**.

"She had tried her hardest, done everything she was told to: had dressed up to please and look pretty, sat in the front row offering her programme, smiled when she didn't feel a bit like smiling..."

Dolly feels so embarrassed that men did not select her to dance with them, and the use of **listing** underscores the sense of extreme effort and attention that she has put into this moment, only to find that it wasn't enough. She tried her best and sacrificed a lot to impress the gentlemen, but all that was in vain. This portrays the patriarchal society she is in. In this society, where men are prioritised, and women have to sacrifice much to impress them.

"...her face driven deep into the pillow, she cried till she could cry no more."

Dolly cries because she feels that she is not accepted in society. She feels betrayed by the wider community and uncertain about her future. The rigid strictures of the Western patriarchal society into which she was born has placed females in a vulnerable position.



TASK: Find 5 other quotations in the text and analyse them. Make sure you note key language techniques they use, why they are being used and what effect they have.



CONTEXT

The short story "And Women Must Weep" was written by Henry Handel Richardson, a pen name used by **Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson**. She was born on the 3rd of January 1870, in Melbourne, Australia. Her trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, is often considered the most accomplished example of contemporary Australian literature. It combines vivid portrayals of an Australian immigrant's life and labour in the goldfields with insightful analyses of his personality.

Henry Handel Richardson attended Melbourne's Presbyterian Ladies' College for four years, from 1883 to 1887. She left Australia for Germany to study music in 1888 and never returned, except for a short stay in 1912. She married J.G. Robertson, the first professor of German literature at the University of London in Dublin, Ireland, in 1895. They had met in Leipzig. After a while, she gave up on her dream of being a concert pianist and instead started writing.



ATTITUDES

Rigid social customs damage society: Within the context of the debutante ball, it is possible to read the situation as an issue created by the wider 'patriarchal society' at large, where men are encouraged to choose women, who present themselves like dolls in a kind of parade. However, Richardson arguably presents a more nuanced and complex portrayal of gender dynamics in the story - the men that Dolly encounters do not seem predatory or materialistic, instead, they are just as awkward about the whole situation as she is. Therefore, we can conclude that this kind of social custom which forces men and women to mate with each other publicly, based on how well they conform to a set of social standards, is deeply unsatisfying and distressing for both genders.

We feel distress when we can't fit in: Despite her best efforts, Dolly feels rejected, abandoned by the society which she valued so highly. This is reflective of the general tension that individuals experience when trying to conform to the world around them; when we try and fit in with others, we often will feel as though we are playing a 'role' in a social situation, or having to mask or avoid parts of our true selves.

Customs should be continually updated and re-evaluated: Richardson presents a politically 'progressive' or liberal stance on the issue of traditions and customs, suggesting that if a social behaviour is outdated or seems damaging to the individual, then it should be revised or eliminated from society, rather than continuing to do damage to the people who conform to it.

THEMES

TASK: Pick two of the themes, make a mind map and add four separate quotations from the story that relate to it. Make short analysis notes explaining how and why each relates to your theme. What, in your opinion, is the author's final message or statement about each piece that you chose?

Acceptance

Innocence

Rejection

Failure

Appearance and Beauty

Insecurity

Betrayal

Confidence

Culture

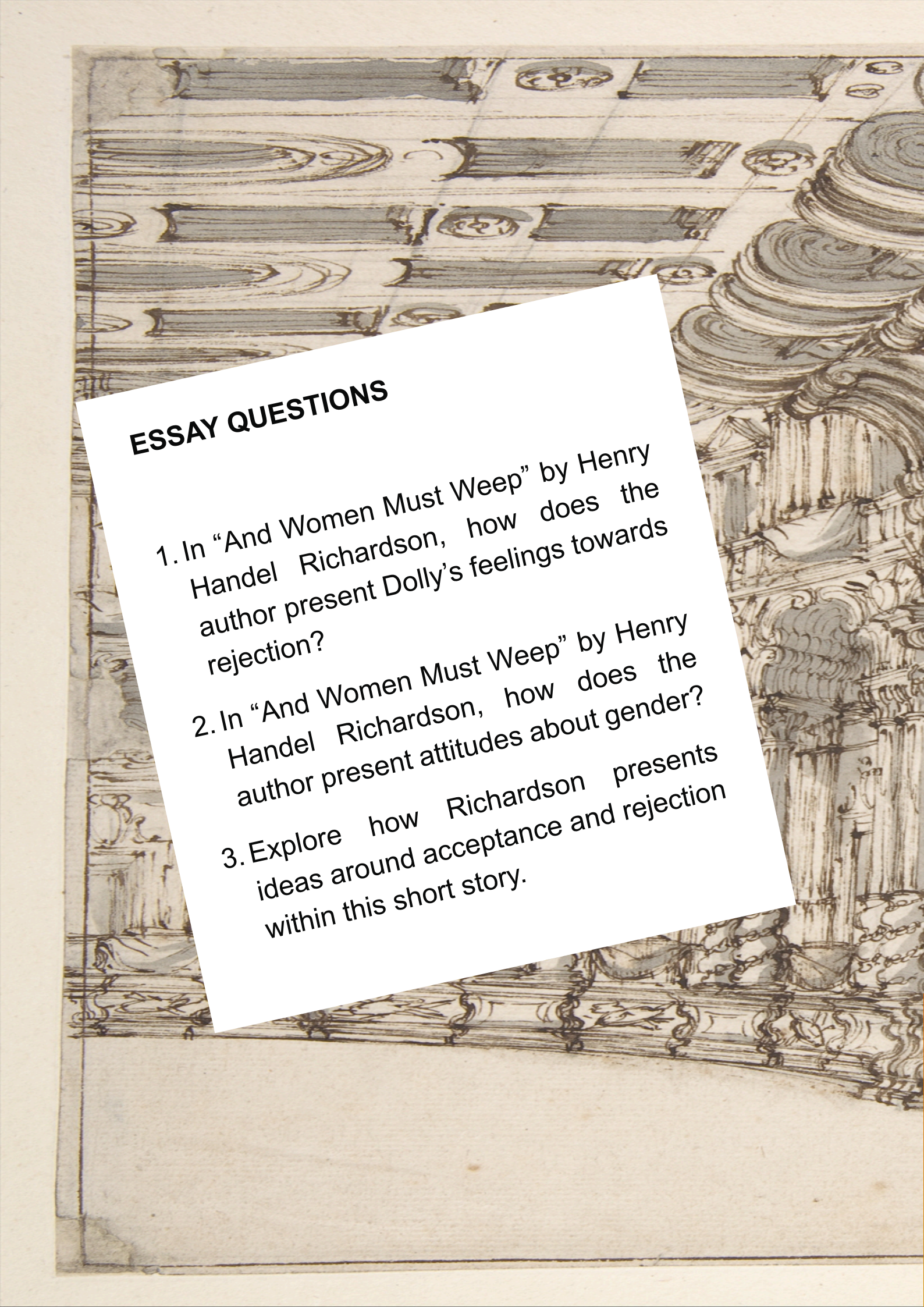
Gender

Society

EXERCISES

1. Identify and discuss the roles played by each character in the story "And Women Must Weep" by Henry Handel Richardson. After doing this, choose a character that is not Dolly and write a brief account of the events of the story from their perspective.
2. What do you think is the main reason that men do not select Dolly to dance with them? Write a brief paragraph, using quotes from the story, explaining your thoughts.
3. Compare the character traits of Dolly and Aunty Cha in the short story "And Women Must Weep" by Henry Handel Richardson. Create two columns, note down their traits in these columns and use them to compare the similarities, and differences, between Dolly and Aunty Cha.
4. Identify and discuss the use of irony in the story, using quotations and analysis in your answer.

TASK: *Imagine you are Dolly's friend. Write a letter to her, giving her advice about what to do next in her life, and how to recover from the shame and sadness that she's currently feeling.*



ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. In "And Women Must Weep" by Henry Handel Richardson, how does the author present Dolly's feelings towards rejection?
2. In "And Women Must Weep" by Henry Handel Richardson, how does the author present attitudes about gender?
3. Explore how Richardson presents ideas around acceptance and rejection within this short story.



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