

A.B.M. College, Golmuri

English Core

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ON THE FACE OF IT

-Susan Hill

Brief Biography of Susan Hill

Susan Elizabeth Hill is a critically acclaimed English novelist and short-story writer whose production first reached its peak in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Her simply drawn novels examine the lives of small, sometimes eccentric people, who look for life and warmth in their often icy and sterile lives.

Born in 1942 to R. H. and Doris Hill in Scarborough, a working-class town on the east coast of England, Hill attended grammar school in Scarborough and Coventry and graduated with honors in English from King's College, University of London, in 1963. Following her graduation, Hill reviewed books for the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* until 1969, when she became a full-time writer, reviewer, and broadcaster. In 1975, she married the Shakespeare scholar Stanley Wells. They had a daughter and lived in Royal Lamington Spa, Warwickshire, and Oxfordshire.

Between 1961 and 1975, Hill published eight novels, three books of short stories, and one collection of radio plays. Her work was recognized by her receiving the Somerset Maugham Award (1971), the Whitbread Literary Award (1972), and the Rhys Memorial Prize (1972). Her latest collection of short stories is *Farthing House: And Other Stories* (2006) and her latest novel

is *Black Sheep* (2013). Susan Hill is married to the Shakespeare scholar Professor Stanley Wells. She moved back to the sea, but this time to North Norfolk, in 2013.

Characters

1. Derry: a boy of 14 with a burnt face, looks ugly, loner, pessimistic, suffered from severe negative complexes, anger and frustration, withdrawn and introverted, low confidence, indulged in self-pity, suspicious of the intent of others
2. Mr. Lamb: An Old man with a tin leg, lonely, craved for company and acceptance, jovial, optimistic, lover of nature, social, outgoing, tolerant, helpful, sensitive, independent, didn't mind children calling him Lamely Lamb or picking the Crab apples.
3. Derry's mother.

Summary

The story deals with the problem of the disabled people and depicts that merely the encouraging words may change our tensed feelings. It is for us to see and understand life in every organism. It does not matter what we look like but it matters how we can uplift a disabled man. It is not the actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment that troubles a disabled man but the behavior of the people around him. People discard him as a useless limb and refuse to accept him in the mainstream of life. So he feels alienated from the society and wants to live in seclusion. In a way Derry suffers from inferiority complex. Mr. Lamb motivates him to think positively about life, people and things. It is a fine day and Mr. Lamb is in his garden. He is an old man with a tin leg. He leads a lonely life and is always ready to accept any visitor who comes in his garden. One day Derry, a young boy of fourteen sneaks into Mr. Lamb's garden. He has a burnt face with acid so he looks very ugly. He has become defiant and withdrawn due to his disfigured face. He does not want to face the world with his ugly and disfigured face. Derry climbs over the wall and cautiously walks through the long grass. He is quite close to Lamb. He is scared when Lamb speaks to him. Lamb asks him to tread carefully because the long grass is littered with wild apples dropped by wind. Derry is utterly confused as he has come there considering the place empty. Having been

detected by Lamb, Derry panics and wants to go. Lamb asks him not to leave as he does not mind anybody's coming into his garden. He keeps the gate always open. He advises to enter through the gate rather than by climbing over the garden wall. Lamb tells that all who come to his garden are welcome. But Derry says that he has not come to steal but he wants only to come into garden. He rather tells Derry not too afraid of anything but Derry points out that the people are afraid of him because of his ugly and disfigured face. Derry adds that he is afraid of himself when he sees his face in the mirror. Lamb tries to console him. He asks him to face the harsh realities of life bravely. He tries to divert the views of Derry from his burnt face to the fruits in the garden, but Derry keeps on talking about his ugly face. Lamb tries to make him understand that it is the inner beauty of a person that matters, not his outer beauty. Derry does not agree with it. He tells lamb that it is important to be handsome from outside also. He says that even his mother kisses him on the other side of his face. He says that he has to spend whole of his life with his half face. Mr. Lamb points out that there is no difference between a flower plant and a weed since both are living and growing plants. Derry remarks that Mr. Lamb can put on trousers and cover up his tingle. Then Mr. Lamb reminds Derry of a fairy tale of Beauty and The Beast in which the princess kisses the Beast who in turn changes into a handsome prince. This makes Derry understand that ugliness is only skin deep. A man is not what he looks like but what he really is. Handsome is that handsome does. This story is to inspire Derry and he should not care for his burnt face. But Derry tells that people stare at his face and they are afraid of him. Derry tells Lamb that women talk of his ugly face. They say that none will kiss except his mother. Mr. Lamb tells him that he must have heard so many other things also. The best thing is to keep his ears shut and need not pay attention to such talks. Mr. Lamb talks about the bees in his garden. Some people like their buzzing while others hate. But Lamb calls it a sweet music. It is only the difference of attitude. Derry tells that people stare at his face so he avoids them. But Mr. Lamb tells that keeping alone is not a fine thing. He tells a story about a man who was always afraid of being run over or getting infected or meeting with some accident. So he locked himself in a room.

There a picture fell on his head and killed him. Derry says that his family often talks about him downstairs when he is not there. They are worried to think what is going to happen to him when they are gone and how he will get on in this world. Mr. Lamb does not agree with him. Lamb encourages him that he has got two

arms, legs, eyes, ears, a tongue and a brain. He can achieve whatever he likes. He can be better than others. He tells Derry that he has got a full can be better than others. He tells Derry that he has got a full body. He can do anything like other people or may do better than others. He asks Lamb several questions to know more about him. Mr. Lamb says that he sits in the sun and reads the books. He likes the windows open to hear the wind. Lamb tells that he has a lot of friends everywhere.

Everybody who comes in his garden is his friend. Derry wonders how a person can be his friend about whom he knows nothing. Derry says that there are some people he hates. But Lamb remarks that hatred would do him more harm than any bottle of acid. Acid only burns our face or so but hatred can burn us away inside. Lamb asks him to be a friend. Derry asks how they can be friends only in one meeting. But Lamb tells him that he can come there at any time even if he is out. Derry thinks to help him. He tells Lamb that with one leg he can fall off a ladder and die. Derry offers to help him but he wants to inform his mother where he is since she will be worried. Lamb doubts if he would come back. Derry assures him to return but Lamb says to himself that people never come back though they say that they will come back. Derry goes back to his house and tells everything to his mother. Derry says that he wants to go there, sit and listen to things and look. Nobody else has ever said the things the old man has said. His mother stops him from going to the old man's house. She tells that she has heard strange stories about the old man. She urges him not to go there again. Derry insists that he must go there otherwise he will never go anywhere in this world. In spite of his mother's strong resistance, Derry slams the door and runs away to help Lamb in collecting crab apples. In the meantime, Mr. Lamb climbs on the ladder for the apples. The ladder falls back and Mr. Lamb is killed. Derry opens the gate and says excitedly that he has come back. Suddenly he catches sight of Mr. Lamb. He runs through the long grass and says, "I came back Lamely Lamb. I did come back." But there is no response. Derry kneels by him and weeps and realizes that he has lost his only friend in this world.

Gist of the Play

- The play depicts beautifully yet grimly the sad world of the physically impaired.
- ▣ It is not the actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment that trouble a disabled man but the attitude of the people around him.
- ▣ Two physically impaired people, Mr. Lamb with a tin leg and Derry with a burnt face, strike a band of friendship.
- ▣ Derry is described as a young boy shy, withdrawn and defiant.
- ▣ People tell him inspiring stories to console him, no one will ever kiss him except his mother that too on the other side of his face
- ▣ Mentions about a woman telling that only a mother can love such a face.
- ▣ Mr. Lamb revives the almost dead feelings of Derry towards life.
- ▣ He motivates him to think positively about life, changes his mind set about people and things how a man locked himself as he was scared-a picture fell off the wall and got killed.
- ▣ Everything appears to be the same but is different- Ex. of bees. And weeds
- ▣ The gate of the garden is always open.
- ▣ Derry is inspired and promises to come back.
- ▣ Derry's mother stops him but he is adamant saying if he does not go now it would be never.
- ▣ When he comes back he sees lamb lying on the ground
- ▣ It is ironical that when he searches a new foothold to live happily, he finds Mr. Lamb dead.
- ▣ In this way the play depicts the heart rendering life of physically disabled people with their loneliness, aloofness and alienation.
- ▣ But at the same time it is almost a true account of the people who don't let a person live happily.

Theme

□ Human Connection and Openness

The play deals with the sense of loss, a sense of isolation and how to overcome it. The actual pain caused by a physical impairment is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the person. The title 'On the Face of it' is used to mean that something seems to be good, true etc. but that needs to be changed when you know more about it.

Appearances are deceptive and most often, we go on dealing with impressions and prejudices about others without bothering to know them. People know Mr Lamb as a lonely, eccentric lame old man but in reality, he is a very kind and generous man who longs for company and he loves his fellow human beings along with all the other creations of God. Similarly, Derek appears to be an abominable ugly boy with a huge scar on his face whom no one loves or likes or befriends. He is the object of other people's hateful stares, ridicules and neglect. Even his mother does not dare to kiss him on the cheek with the scar. Yet this boy who is suffering from an acute inferiority complex has a tender and sensitive heart. He wants to love and be loved. Fortunately, he meets Mr Lamb who transforms him with his healing touch.

Questions & Answers

Q1- What is it that draws Derry towards Mr. Lamb in spite of himself?

A1- Both Derry and Mr. Lamb are disabled. Derry has a burnt face and Mr. Lamb has a tin leg. Derry is depressed because of his ugly face. People don't like him or are afraid of him. His parents also think that he will not be able to do anything after their death. Such things have made him so sad and depressed that he has started to hate people. Mr. Lamb discovers this about him while talking to him. He encourages him to lead a normal life and suggests him to watch and listen to everything in order to enjoy life. He gives him his own example that people tease him for his tin leg but he doesn't care about this. Such positive things draw Derry towards Mr. Lamb

Q2- In which section of the play does Mr. Lamb display signs of loneliness and disappointment? What are the ways in which Mr. Lamb tries to overcome these feelings?

A3- In the middle part of the first scene, we observe that Mr. Lamb is lonely. He tells Derry that when it is a bit cooler, he will get the ladder and a stick, and pull down those crab apples. He makes jelly with them. Derry could help him. He also tells him that he is interested in anybody or anything that God has created. It may be a person, flower, fruit, grass, weeds or rubbish. He also tells him that he sits in the sun and reads books and that he does not use curtains in his house because he wants to enjoy both light and darkness. These all are the signs of his loneliness and also his ways of overcoming it.

Q3- The actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the person with disabilities. What is the kind of behaviour that the person expects from others?

A3- The story reveals the bitter truth of a life led by a disabled person. They not only suffer physical pain but also suffer emotionally due to the absurd behavior of people. They are teased and disliked by others. Derry has a burnt face and people don't like him for being ugly. Some get afraid of him which does not allow him to stay with them. On the other hand, Mr. Lamb has a tin leg and is teased by kids as 'Lamey Lamb'. He lives alone in his big house and has no one in his life. Such instances show that the sense of alienation that these people feel causes them constant pain. Such persons expect cooperation from others. They do not want sympathy but just a reasonable behavior just like normal people get from their counterparts.

Q4- Will Derry get back to his old seclusion or will Mr. Lamb's brief association effect a change in the kind of life he will lead in the future?

A4- Derry will not get back to his old seclusion because Mr. Lamb had changed his way of thinking. He told him that hating people and living alone is more harmful than what acid did to him. He told him to take risk and face people. He also suggested that it's just his face that has disfigured. He has legs, arms, heart and brain and he could do whatever he wants to do in his life. He also says that

there are chances that Derry can achieve more than a normal person can if he makes a firm determination to achieve something. This surely had a great impact on him and this can be seen that he returned back to the garden though his mother was not ready to let him go. He decided to face it and live without fear of being disliked by anyone and therefore runs back to the garden in order to live those moments again which he liked when he was in the company of Mr. Lamb.