

The Wasteland

By Alan Paton

The moment that the bus moved on he knew he was in danger, for by the lights of it he saw the figures of the young men waiting under the tree. That was the thing feared by all, to be waited for by young men. It was a thing he had talked about, now he was to see it for himself.

It was too late to run after the bus; it went down the dark street like an island of safety in a sea of perils. Though he had known of his danger only for a second, his mouth was already dry, his heart was pounding on his breast, something within him was crying out in protest against the coming event.

His wages were in his purse; he could feel them weighing heavily against his thigh. That was what they wanted from him. Nothing counted against that. His wife could be made a widow, his children made fatherless, nothing counted against that. Mercy was the unknown word.

While he stood there irresolute he heard the young men walking towards him, not only from the side where he had seen them, but from the other also. They did not speak, their intention was unspeakable. The sound of their feet came on the wind to him. The place was well chosen, for behind him was the high wall of the convent, and the barred door that would not open before a man was dead. On the other side of the road was the waste land, full of wire and iron and the bodies of old cars. It was his only hope, and he moved towards it; as he did so he knew from the whistle that the young men were there too.

His fear was great and instant, and the smell of it went from his body to his nostrils. At that very moment one of them spoke, giving directions. So trapped was he

that he was filled suddenly with strength and anger, and he ran towards the waste land swinging a heavy stick. In the darkness a form loomed up at him, and he swung the stick at it, and heard it give a cry of pain. Then he plunged blindly into the wilderness of wire and iron and the bodies of old cars.

Something caught him by the leg, and he brought his stick crashing down on it, but it was no man, only some knife-edged piece of iron. He was sobbing and out of breath, but he pushed on into the waste, while behind him they pushed on also, knocking against the old iron bodies and kicking against tins and buckets. He fell into some grotesque shape of wire; it was barbed and tore at his clothes and flesh. Then it held him, so that it seemed to him that death must be near, and having no other hope, he cried out, "Help me, help me!" In what should have been a great voice but was voiceless and gasping. He tore at the wire, and it tore at him too, ripping his face and his hands.

Then suddenly he was free. He saw the bus returning, and he cried out again in the great voiceless voice, "Help me, help me!" Against the lights of it he could plainly see the form of one of the young men. Death was near him, and for a moment he was filled with the injustice of life, that could end thus for one who had always been hard-working and law-abiding. He lifted the heavy stick and brought it down on the head of his pursuer, so that the man crumpled to the ground, moaning and groaning as though life had been unjust to him also.

Then he turned and began to run again, but ran first into the side of an old lorry, which

sent him reeling. He lay there for a moment expecting the blow that would end him, but even then his wits came back to him, and he turned over twice and was under the lorry. His very entrails seemed to be coming into his mouth, and his lips could taste sweat and blood. His heart was like a wild thing in his breast, and seemed to lift his whole body each time that it beat. He tried to calm it down, thinking it might be heard, and tried to control the noise of his gasping breath, but he could not do either of these things.

Then suddenly against the dark sky he saw two of the young men. He thought they must hear him, but they themselves were gasping like drowned men, and their speech came by fits and starts.

Then one of them said, "Do you hear?"

They were silent except for their gasping, listening. And he listened also, but could hear nothing but his own exhausted heart.

"I heard a man . . . running . . . on the road," said one.

"He's got away . . . let's go."

Then some more of the young men came up, gasping and cursing the man who had got away.

"Freddy," said one, "your father's got away."

But there was no reply.

"Where's Freddy?" one asked.

One said, "Quiet!" Then he called in a loud voice, "Freddy."

But still there was no reply.

"Let's go," he said.

They moved off slowly and carefully, then one of them stopped.

"We are saved," he said. "Here is the man."

He knelt down on the ground, and then fell to cursing.

"There's no money here," he said.

One of them lit a match, and in the small light of it the man under the lorry saw him fall back.

"It's Freddy," one said. "He's dead."

Then the one who had said, "Quiet" spoke again.

The man under the lorry heard them struggling with the body of the dead young man, and he turned once, twice, deeper into his hiding-place. The young men lifted the body and swung it under the lorry so that it touched him. Then he heard them moving away, not speaking, slowly and quietly, making an occasional sound against some obstruction in the waste.

He turned on his side, so that he would not need to touch the body of the young man. He buried his face in his arms, and said to himself in the idiom of his own language, "People, arise! The world is dead." Then he arose himself, and went heavily out of the wasteland.

THE WASTE LAND
BY ALAN PATON

AUTHORS VIEW

The author reveals his views of life through the title, character, setting and other aspect of the story.

TITLE

The title tells us about the setting (a wasteland – place where rubbish is dumped). It is significant in conveying the theme. The wasteland is filled with wire and iron that tear and scratch the man. This cause suffering like what money can do. It can bring suffering as happened to the father and son.

PLOT SUMMARY

The man with the wages who is going home to his family is attacked by a gang of young men who want his wages. He runs from them, hitting one on the way and hides under the old lorry in the wasteland. While there he hears them talk about the fact that he may have escaped and hears one of them address Freddy, who we find out is his son. Freddy does not answer and when a dead body is found on the ground it is found to be Freddy. The irony is that the body is thrown by the young men under the lorry where it rests against the man. The man gets up and says, 'People arise! The world is dead.' He then went 'heavily' (sadly) out of the wasteland.

SETTING

- The wasteland, it is dirty, ugly and a dangerous place gives the atmosphere of evil. The name of the country or place is not given and we can say that this story takes place anywhere in the world. It is like a wilderness full of grotesque slopes of iron and waste.
- The story takes place at night. The darkness also symbolizes the darkness of evil in human nature.
- The setting is appropriate to the story of violence and death.

CHARACTERS

1. The man: Is not given a name. He is symbolic of all men who live in desperate areas of the world where there is no mercy. 'Mercy was the unknown word.' He has a wife and children who rely on him. 'His wife could be made a widow, his children fatherless.' He is frightened, 'his fear was great and instant,' his fear was like wild thing in his breast. After he has killed his son in self-defense he will have to live with that thought, for he will be unable to tell the police or his family. What can he say to them? He has murdered his own son? He also has to live with the thought that his son is a thief who will even steal from his father.
2. Freddy: a member of a gang of thieves. He will even steal from his own family. He gets killed by his father who is trying to get away and in the dark and panic does not know his son is there.
3. The Gang: nameless young men who represent injustice and greed.

THEMES

- *Greed for money brings suffering even to innocent and good people.*
For example
 - a) The man was hardworking and law-abiding, but he suffered because of the young men's desire for money.
 - b) Freddy's greedy for money made him attack his own father.
 - c) The father unknowingly killed his own son in self-defense. The young men committed violence and the father in order to defend himself resorted to violence.
- *Money is the root of all evil.*
- Money should not be more important than someone's life. What is the world coming to when a son will steal from his father? Why is the convent door barred to all but the dead? This is a world without mercy or help. An individual must use his/her own wits to survive.

SYMBOLISM

- *The Wasteland*
- an example of wasteful life
- the stench that would come from the place. It all comes down to the view of life – what it has all ended to – waste.

I think that the story's title 'The Wasteland' refers to his beliefs that there is no longer any of the peace, order, joy and hope which make life meaningful and worthwhile. All these positive factors have been destroyed as in the 'Wasteland' where we find only rubbish and broken discarded things.

The characters in the Wasteland seem to be caught up helplessly in a tragic inevitable sequence of events. That is to say, the people have become powerless against the dehumanizing effects to the 'wasteland' of modern life

*unemployment

*alienation

*crime

*violation

The reason for calling the father only 'he' is to show that he could be any one of thousand who have this experience. In my opinion, the author is using his characters to portray a common experience that of the younger generation turning against their elders because of unemployment and boredom.

On the other hand the elders or those in authority hit back blindly and destructively (as the father blindly hit back and killed the son).

I also believe that 'the world is dead' said by the father means firstly that the personal world of the father—that is his family has been destroyed by the death of his son and secondly that the father's faith and belief in the hopelessness and can no longer go about their lives in peace, security and hope in the future.

I think 'The Wasteland' is in fact a story about the conflict between the old and the young – between the older conservative law abiding and the often unemployed youth who had no money.

The father could have been any of the older people and the son any of the young. Of course it was a shock to realize that the old man had actually killed his own son—but the writer meant them to be only seen as representative of their generations. We know this because he didn't even give the old man a name or any information about him, his family or his son. He was just one of many people who found themselves in the same situation (being robbed by the young men).

I think that the author has taken the extreme case of a father killing his son to draw the reader's attention to the rising violence and crime among the young so that people will try and find solutions to the unemployment which cause these problems.

FORM 5: Worksheet for 'CRIPPLE NO MORE' by Manik Reddy.

1. Rajesh is a 'cripple in many different ways. (i.e. cripple physically, emotionally, in his relationship and his attitude). Discuss how Rajesh is a cripple in all these different ways using a mind map.

2. How is the attitude portrayed by the Fijian youths similar or different to your own response towards crippled people.

3. Where is the story set? (consider the time and the different places for this story)

4. Use mind maps to describe the two main characters in the story (i.e. Rajesh & Niemi).

5. What does this story teach us about relationships, races and human values?

6. What techniques does the author use to give meaning to the story?

7. Write a Literal Essay on the following topic using Cripple No More to get evidence.
A character's choice in the story affected the ending.