

An analysis of the story The Gioconda Smile

The plot

The story opens with a visit paid by Mr. Hutton to Janet Spence, a neighbour of his. While waiting for her to show up, he is drawn to the various artistic items in the room. These items include paintings and photographs from Greece and Rome. Perhaps this tells us something about Janet Spence: she is a woman of a refined taste and also an intellectual lady. We also learn that she is in her thirties and unmarried. While waiting for her to join him Mr. Hutton spends a considerable amount of time in front of the mirror in self contemplation. This mirror image reminds us of the myth of Narcissus who got so enamored with the reflection of his own beauty in the pond or lake that he drowned. Mr Hutton is so proud of his hair and his mustache because they symbolize masculinity and manhood for him. At the bottom of page 1. We meet Miss Janet Spence. She's said to have some kind of Gioconda Smile, a reference to Leonardo de Vinci's famous painting. The painting is universally known for the mysterious smile of the lady in the painting. The association of the painting and Janet Spence is the fact that, as we come to learn later is that Janet Spence's character is also shrouded in mystery. On top of page 2, the author says: what a queer face she had! That small mouth pursed by the Gioconda expression into a little snout. The conversation between them is very short and ends by Mr. Hutton inviting her to see his sick wife Emily. We learn that Emily is very ill and perhaps Janet's visit will do her good. We also notice how Mr. Hutton is very restless, eager to leave. On page 2 and before he leaves Janet Spence, we notice that he spends time contemplating her red cheeks because whenever she talks she blushes, a sign of chastity and virtue. The Paragraph before the last on page 2 reveals this; she is described as a virgin of 36, but still unwithered; she had her charms and there was something really enigmatic about her. As Mr. Hutton expresses his wish to leave, Janet Spence offers to see him off but he emphatically refuses and runs away in a childlike manner towards his car which he has parked somewhere outside Janet Spence's house. His chauffeur named Mnhab is waiting for him. In the back seat, Dorris who is a mistress of Mr. Hutton, is impatiently waiting for him. She is very young and calls him Teddy Bear. In this scene, Mr. Hutton displays the pleasure seeking side of his character by treating her as a sexual object. He incessantly kisses her and exploits her innocent imbecility. On page 4, Dorris asks him whether their relationship is morally justifiable and we deduce that the English society at that time looked with suspicion at extramarital relationships. Mr. Hutton's reply is affirmative in the sense that she should read Freud who claims that sexual liberation is a healthy lifestyle. Notice also how Mr. Hutton is proud of his masculinity. Before the end

of this chapter we are told how little Dorris has to invent lies to her family to justify her absence.

In the second chapter we move Mr. Hutton's household where we meet his sick wife Emily. She's very sick and lonely; we are told that their relationship has become stagnant; while Mr. Hutton is by her side, he keeps being absent minded and continues to think about his previous meeting with Janet Spence and Dorris. We notice how he feels no sympathy whatsoever for his weak wife; his selfishness becomes very obvious when she asks him to accompany her on the journey to Landridrod (a location the doctor has recommended) Mr. Hutton selfishly refuses. As she begins to shed tears, Mr. Hutton leaves the room. We also learn that Mr. Hutton has never been sympathetic towards all sorts of weaknesses (the weak, the poor, the diseased, etc). After he has had his dinner and drinks he goes to see his wife and apologize he finds her already asleep. The next day Janet Spence's visit has a good impact on Emily's mood: we notice how Emily opens up like a flower. Mr. Hutton realizes that he is incapable of feeling pity for the weak and the sick but he soon finds an excuse for that by openly claiming that sympathy does not mend a diseased liver or a weak heart. His sense over self confidence is clear when he says to his wife that he is the perfect husband (page7). His boastful statement that it's good to be alive adds salt to the wound because this is not a proper thing to say in front of a sick, dying person; it's totally pitiless and unfeeling. His selfishness becomes clear again when she tearfully asks him not to leave her alone, he just ignores her request, pretending that he won't be back till late at night. When he comes back he meets Dr. Libbard who looks very sad and melancholic; he delivers the sad news of the death of Mr. Hutton's wife. The apparent cause is heart failure.

In chapter 3, Mr. Hutton undergoes some moments of self investigation and soul searching; he realizes that all his previous life has been dedicated to pleasure seeking activities; he decides that from now on he will engage in intellectual activities such as reading Milton and writing a book about The Effect Of Diseases on Civilization; he has made a resolution to establish a balance in his life: a balance between reason and passion; he calls it a Stygian oath or solemn oath, page12. Afterwards, Mr. Hutton goes to see Janet Spence where she insinuates to him that they have lots of things in common and that he needs a soulmate, not just mere physical, sensual pursuits. This is a real test for Mr. Hutton because what Janet is actually doing is a marriage proposal; she almost in tears expresses her desire to marry him, but he decides to leave at once (a kind of escape)

Now we're in Florence where Mr. Hutton is sojourning with Dorris, his mistress (a sort of girlfriend). This shows that Mr. Hutton has not been truthful concerning the decision to change: he isn't able to abandon his old ways of treating women as objects; all he wants is mere temporary relationships; this explains the difference between him and Janet Spence; Janet wants a permanent bond or relationship. At the bottom of page 15, we are told that Dorris stays with him like a guilty conscience. This guilt stems from the fact that

he knows he has been exploiting her youth and innocence. To atone for this, we learn that he has married her and both have gone to Florence (probably on honeymoon). Meanwhile, Janet has been spreading rumors about how he has poisoned his wife in order to marry Dorris. People have also been blaming him for his immediate marriage after the funeral of his wife. It's inappropriate, they keep saying. At this stage we are tempted to believe in those rumors, especially bearing in mind his selfishness and indifference to his late wife Emily.

Chapter 5. In this chapter, things get very complicated for Mr. Hutton: almost all newspapers speak about his outrageous crime and how an inquest is going to take place (investigations into the cause of Emily's death. Furthermore, we learn that Dorris is already pregnant with a child. He decides to take Janet Spence to court for spreading false rumors about him. At this stage, we're in suspense as to the real criminal especially when the outcome of the investigation the inquest confirms the idea of poisoning. Witnesses, such as the chauffeur Mnab have been called to present their testimonies. The next scene in this chapter is Dorris lying on bed and crying because she enormously loves Mr. Hutton whom she calls Teddy Bear (an endearing name). She threatens that if the police tries to harm him, she will take her own life; this shows the intensity of her love. Now Mr. Hutton realizes how irresponsible he has been in his life. Dr. Libbard advises Dorris not to commit the folly of suicide because she will be killing two lives (her own and her baby's). At the end of this chapter, we learn that Mr. Hutton is going to appear before the court for trial.

Chapter 6 comes as a shock, a bombshell: in a conversation with Dr. Libbard, Janet Spence coldly admits that that she is the real killer and poisoner of Mrs. Hutton (Emily). And the story ends with Dr. Libbard taking note of that in his notebook.

General comments:

We might deduce that Janet Spence has killed Emily, Mr. Hutton's wife so that she can marry Mr. Hutton. It's a very pessimistic story which shows the dangers of being ruled by passion and not controlling it. The title itself conveys the theme of mystery; like the Gioconda Smile, Janet Spence is a mysterious character; none of us suspected at any moment that she is the real perpetrator of the crime. It's only till the very end that the mystery of the crime is unraveled. It's like a detective story where you have to pay attention to the smallest details. One of those details in the story is that it's Janet who has served the coffee to Mrs. Hutton. Miss Spence kills Emily assuming that this will free her husband and marry him., but it actually freed him to marry an 18 year old girl. To conclude, there are two main themes in this story; first there is the theme of objectification of women; we see how Mr. Hutton looks at them as objects; he looks at his wife a crippled weak presence who is just impeding his freedom. In all his encounters with Dorris, there is an emphasis on just her physique. Concerning his relationship with

Spence, it's true that he is fascinated by her intellectual and artistic taste, something that he has lacked in his life, but he has always looked at her as a world to explore physically. Janet Spence would never allow him to do so because on the one hand she's chaste and on the other she wants to have a relationship with him within the framework of marriage.

Further notes on The Gioconda Smile story: part 2

This story is undoubtedly a tragedy because the end is catastrophic for all the main characters. A tragedy is a literary genre wherein the main characters undergo a tragic end because of a defect or a flaw in their personality or because of social and psychological circumstances which contribute to their downfall. In this story Mr. Hutton ends up facing the false accusation that he has poisoned his wife. Dorris pays the price of her superficiality by loving a man who doesn't love her as much as she does. At the end of the story, she ends up lying in bed crying and threatening to take her own life. Janet Spence resorts to evil means (poisoning Emily) In order to marry Mr. Hutton. Although her fate is not clarified at the end, we deduce or infer that she will face justice.

Main themes. Objectification of women: In this story, Mr. Hutton's relationship with all the women is characterized by superficiality and selfishness. Now that his wife Emily has become crippled and weak, Mr. Hutton finds all kinds of excuses and pretexts to shun her. His exploitation of little Dorris is crystal clear. His attraction to Janet Spence isn't based on real love and a desire to form a permanent marital bond with her; all he wants is a mere transient, temporary relationship. No wonder then that when she expresses her love for him, he immediately leaves her house.

The theme of narcissism or self love: Mr. Hutton is a clear example of this myth. In brief, Narcissus is a myth about a young man who was so much absorbed in his own beauty and image that he rejected all the women who fell in love with him. One day, as he was wandering in the forest, he came by a lake and wanted to drink from it; as he bent, he saw the reflection of his own beauty and wanted to catch it, but he fell in the pond and drowned. The lesson to draw from this myth is about the dangers and consequences of self love. Mr. Hutton is an example of the narcissistic guy: the first time we encounter him in the story, he is in front of the mirror contemplating his face, hair mustache and the smell of tobacco he is smoking. All his relationships with women in this story are characterized by egoism and a desire to exploit. To illustrate, as soon as his wife Emily passes away, he doesn't wait long to marry Dorris, in complete disregard and disrespect for traditions and customs.

The theme of mystery: This theme is mainly associated with Janet Spence. On the one hand, the author says that the look on her face resembles that of the Mona Lisa, the lady on the famous painting by Leonardo de Vinci. Everybody in the world is bewildered and

perplexed by the smile of the Mona Lisa and none has been able to decipher that smile. Janet Spence remains a bit of a mystery and none of us has suspected that she could be the murderess of Mr. Hutton's wife.

A detailed analysis of Shirley Jackson's The Lottery

The title: when we look at the title, we immediately think that the story is going to be about winning a prize or something good or beneficial but at the end of the story we come to learn that the winner of the Lottery is going to be put to death by stoning; therefore we can say that the title is very ironic., an irony is when the reality is contrary to what we as readers expect.

The first paragraph: The setting in time is June; it's sunny. June is usually a time for joyful activities and festivities. Again, it's very ironic because we expect the people of this village to celebrate some joyful event only to discover that what they celebrate the killing of the winner by throwing stones at him or her.

Paragraph 2: begins by reference children playing noisily, collecting and piling stones; we think that they are preparing for some kind of game to play. Usually children are associated with innocence but sadly enough they are made to participate in this evil activity of the lottery. We see how innocence is tainted and corrupted at an early stage. We also note in this paragraph the clear contrast between boys and girls: we see how society conditions them by assigning roles to them. The boys are active playing noisily whereas the girls are passive; this theme of gender pops up frequently in the story.

Paragraph 3: this paragraph elaborates more on the theme of gender: women are portrayed or presented performing secondary roles; they come after their husbands. The implication or the message here is that we are dealing with a male dominated society. The fact that the men laughed and smiled gives us the impression that some happy and jovial event is going to take place; there is no mention so far about the coming grim tragedy.

Paragraph 4: the lottery is conducted by Mr. Summers, a happy and cheerful man; his name is also ironic because we are misled into thinking that he supervises some positive, beneficial activity, but his real role is to make sure that this superstitious ritual of the lottery continues to exist. He is carrying the black box which contains papers. The colour black is usually associated with death. The different families will draw a paper from inside the black box and anyone who picks the fearful paper with a dot will be stoned to death. To put it differently the winner will win a one way ticket to the hereafter.

Paragraph 5 :(last paragraph on page 2): in this paragraph we learn a few details about the lottery; this tradition is very old; this idea is reinforced by the fact that the black box and the stool are worn out and in a bad shape; we are also told that Mr. Summers has

always been urging the villagers to renew and renovate or perhaps replace the box and the stool by new ones, but his requests always go unnoticed. We should remember that the black box and the stool are symbols that stand for worn out and old traditions.

More details about the black box: it has been used for generations and also been neglected. We should always keep in mind that the black box stands for old traditions; the tradition of the lottery itself is old and ancient; it's as if Shirley Jackson wants to imply that old traditions should always be kept under review; here people are blindly following a stupid tradition which ends in bloodshed and nobody questions the validity of this ritual.

Paragraph 3 (on page 2) Mrs. Hutchinson arrives late, one of the villagers arrives late, her name reminds us of the famous American woman who was persecuted because she expressed different opinions from the mainstream ideology. We have a feeling and a presentiment that her fate will be the same.

Paragraph 4 (on page 2) we learn that Mrs. Hutchinson is friends with Mrs. Delacroix; this is very ironic because she will participate in the stoning of Mr. Hutchinson at the end of the story. This shows how human nature is evil.

On page 3 the theme of gender comes to the surface again when Mr. Summers says: don't you have a grown boy to do it for you. On another occasion he says: glad to see your mother has got a man to do it. The point here, as I said earlier, is that this is a male dominated society.

On page 4 we learn that this village organizes this ritual because it brings good crops, this is a superstitious belief where blood has to be shed for the crops to grow abundantly. The rest of the story is about the details of the lottery and how Mrs. Hutchinson becomes the ill fated winner of the lottery (of course ironically speaking). While she is being stoned by even her son and her best friend Mrs. Delacroix, Mrs. Hutchinson keeps screaming and shouting that it's not fair.

Themes: a critique of superstitions and old traditions: in this society nobody questions the validity of this ritual, especially bearing in mind that this tradition has been abandoned in other communities. The second theme is the evil that exists in all of us; that is to say Mrs. Hutchinson gets stoned by even those people closest to her (her son and her best friend). The theme of gender which I referred to in my analysis.

The use of irony: we have many ironies in the story; the first irony is in the opening paragraph when we are told it's a beautiful sunny day in June, we have an optimistic beginning but a tragic end. The second big irony is related to Mrs. Hutchinson: she has taken part in this ritual before but she has never protested; it's only now that she becomes

the victim that she starts screaming that it's not fair; this is true of all of us: so long as it's not me, it's okay, but when we become the target or the victim we start to protest

Extensive reading: An Analysis of the short story The Country Of The Blind, by H.G. Wells

The plot or sequence of events

The setting: the story takes place in a Latin American mysterious mountain valley. It's called The Valley of The Blind, and it's characterized by remoteness and isolation. Before the eruption of a volcano, this valley used to be a refuge and a sanctuary for people who escaped the tyranny of Spanish rulers, but some natural disaster, perhaps an earthquake has caused it to be severely cut off from the outside world. The events of story are narrated by who happened to be cast away and stranded in this valley. The valley, he says, has everything that the heart of a man could desire: sweet water, green pastures, rich soil for farming, excellent fruits, forests, abundant springs, fine climate and livestock. The only imperfection in this valley is that its inhabitants suffered from blindness.

Initially, the citizens of this valley were not totally blindly; they were semi blind, but from generation to generation, their eyesight deteriorated until it was completely lost. However, thanks to their resilience, these blind people could adapt and adjust to this misfortune by relying on their other senses, such as hearing, smelling and touching. Through everyday use and practice, their senses have become so acute and sharp they can analyze and be aware of the existence of the slightest item without having to use their eyesight. They live in this valley in peace, prosperity and contentment.

The story of these blind people could have gone unnoticed and unheard of, had it not been for a mountaineer called Nuñez. One day, Nuñez happens to be taking part in a mountaineering expedition with a group of hikers in The Andes (the highest mountains in Latin America). During this trip, Nuñez strays from the group and gets lost. During his efforts to track his friends, Nuñez fails and falls down a slope directly into the valley of the blind. Being tired and weary, Nuñez falls into a deep sleep. When he wakes up the next morning and to his marvel and surprise, he finds out that the landscape of this valley was green and abundant in flowers, there were also signs of good cropping and farming. Llamas, a Latin American breed of animal, looking like a camel, but smaller in shape were domesticated by the people of this valley. The streets are well kept and clean. The only bizarre thing that Nuñez notices is that their houses have no windows.

As Nuñez goes on his explanation of this valley, he comes across some members of this secluded community sitting on heaps of grass; others are performing some farming tasks and some children playing. Nuñez also notices that there is a look of self satisfaction and contentment on their faces. Nuñez tries to attract their attention by waving his hand to them and gesticulating, but none of them seems notice him. He feels frustrated and says: the fools must be blind (bottom of page 3). As he approaches them: he was sure that they

were blind. He was sure that this was The Country of The Blind of which the legends told (last paragraph of page 3).

As Núñez tries to get closer to them, they become aware of his presence through their sharp sense of hearing. One of them shouts: a man, or a spirit coming down from the rocks, page 4 .Núñez concludes that these people must be blind and immediately thinks of the famous proverb: in the country of the blind, the one eyed man is a king. He keeps repeating this proverb with a sense of delight and confidence because this proverb gives him reassurance that his eyesight is an advantage which will allow him to rule and dominate these handicapped and disabled people.

These blind people ask Núñez about where he comes from and he replies Bogota, a place in Bolivia. As a reference they decide to call him Bogota. They get closer to him and start touching his body from head to toe; when they reach his eyelids, they would feel them so hard that Núñez would think they would gouge his eyes. They tell Núñez that he has just come into the world and that he has still a lot to learn from them; they tell him that he is malformed and needs to learn from them the ways of the world. This is, of course insulting and offensive to Núñez who thinks that his eyesight offers him an advantage over them. As they lead him towards their houses, one of them offers his hand to show him the way, but Núñez ,with a sense of superiority, refuses the offer claiming that he can see. In spite of the fact that he can see,,he stumbles .

On the way, Núñez feels confident that he will teach them about the civilized world he comes from. As they arrive home, they investigate his body and keep telling him that he is imperfect and has a lot to learn from them. They tell him their own version of the creation, life and religion. To his dismay, Núñez finds himself in the position of a learner, listening to their explanations and conception of the world. He still thinks that he is a God sent messenger to help these blind people out of their darkness. He also rejoices in the fact that God has given him eyesight to enjoy the beauty and magnificence of the world. However, Núñez is amazed at the fact that in spite of the lack of their eyesight, these blind people live in total happiness; they enjoy food, music, clothes,etc, and seem to want nothing. Through everyday use, their sense of hearing, smelling and touching has become so acute and sharp that they can differentiate between individuals through smell (just like dogs); they can hear his heart beat. In order to teach them a lesson about the value of eyesight, Núñez defies them to a test : he challenges them to a fight. No sooner does he hold a spade than he realizes they are already aware of this act; he tries to escape but they soon catch up with him and encircle him. Núñez manages to escape through a gap and run away. Tired and panic stricken, Núñez sat down to rest. Through a process of self investigation, Núñez realizes the falsity and fake ness of the proverb: In the valley of the blind, the one eyed man is a king. In spite of his eyesight, Núñez can't have the upper hand over these blind and handicapped people. He also realizes that he cannot survive on his own; he must rely on them for food and shelter.

As a punishment for his rebellion, Núñez is whipped and subjected to hard work. He becomes an obedient citizen within this community. The turning point of the story is when Núñez falls in love with Sarote, the beautiful daughter of one of the patriarchs of

this community. Their love grows stronger and stronger and they spend their days in nature. One day, Nuñez decides to ask for her hand but all the members of the community, including her parents, refuse. The main reason, they say, is that Nuñez's eyesight makes him imperfect and unfit for marriage; they don't want their race and blood to be corrupted by Nuñez's imperfect blood. They all claim that he is idiot and clumsy. Sarote feels disappointed and doesn't stop weeping. She tells her community that Nuñez is making lots of efforts to change for the better and that he is improving. To resolve this problem, the community decides that they are ready to accept Nuñez as a suitor for Sarote on condition that he removes his eyeballs through an surgical operation; in other words, he must sacrifice his eyesight. They maintain that Nuñez's insanity is due to his eyesight. This is of course a very high price to pay for love. Nuñez gives them his approval and arranges for the operation to take place in a few days. In the meantime, Nuñez spends most of the time wandering in the world of nature, contemplating the beauty of the mountains, the rivers, the trees, the multicolored birds and flowers, the sunshiny, the islands, the forests, the sun rise and the sun set, the moon and the stars and the seas. He realizes that losing all of these pleasures and luxuries is a heavy price to pay. He ultimately decides to climb up those slopes and leave the valley of the blind behind. The end of the story is open ended ; it's not clear whether Nuñez has survived or not.

In this session, we will tackle the following: the setting, the plot in terms of events, climax, the end or resolution, and the main themes.

Setting in terms of place:

The story takes place in a valley called the country of the blind. This valley is completely isolated and cut off from the outer world; it's surrounded by the high range of mountains of The Andes of South America. Before the earthquake, this place used to be a refuge for those who escaped the oppression and tyranny of the Spanish rulers. The earthquake was such a disaster that it turned this valley into a remote, inaccessible place. It's in this valley that the citizens of The Country of The Blind live. The events of the story happen in this valley.

Setting in terms of time:

The time of the story is not specified; this gives the story an aspect of universality; in other words the events we witness in the story can happen anytime, anywhere.

The plot:

The story begins with a mountaineer called Nuñez, the protagonist, who, while climbing a mountain in Ecuador, falls down accidentally; he slips down a steep slope and descends right into the valley of The Country of The Blind. This place is completely isolated from the outside world. Nuñez finds out that the citizens of this place are blind; therefore, he concludes that it must be The Country of The Blind mentioned in the fables. When Nuñez discovers that these people are blind, he delightfully remembers the proverb: in

the Country of the blind, the one eyed man is king. He decides to turn his ability to see into an advantage; that is to say, he is going to become their teacher, instructing them about the value of eyesight and the existence of a world beyond their knowledge and imagination. He also finds out that these blind people lead a happy, prosperous life; their streets are clean and well kept. They have a sophisticated road network and they are also skillful in farming; moreover, in spite of their blindness, they are capable of keeping and domesticating llamas, a wild South American animal. Nuñez also notices that their houses are windowless. Nuñez tries to establish his dominance and supremacy by teaching them about eyesight, but all his efforts are in vain. They dismiss his teachings as insane and idiotic. They have been able to fully adapt to life without eyesight for years. For them, Nuñez's explanations about eyesight are mere ramblings of a sick mind and imagination. Feeling angry and frustrated, Nuñez tries to defy them but he fails. Despite their blindness, they subject Nuñez to a punishment by whipping him and making him a servant to Yacob, one of the patriarchs of this blind community. While working for Yacob, Nuñez falls in love with Yacob's daughter Medina-Saroté. No matter how hard he tries to teach her about eyesight, he doesn't succeed because like her community, she thinks that his brain is diseased. Nuñez proposes to marry her but the whole community rejects him on the grounds that he is insane, clumsy, incompetent. However they stipulate that he can marry her on condition that he removes his eyes, which they think are the cause of his insanity and imperfections.

Finally, Nuñez submits to the community's Will and accepts to undergo a surgical operation to have his eyes removed by the doctor. On the day of the operation, while the villagers are still asleep, Nuñez wakes up early and ventures out in order to enjoy the beauty of the world for the last time; as he wanders contemplating the magnificent bounties of the world, he concludes that losing his eyesight would be a heavy cost to pay for his love for Saroté. After a long inner debate, he decides to climb up the valley and find a route out or a passage leading to the world he has come from. The end of the story is open ended: some critics say Nuñez manages to escape; others claim that he dies. In fact, whether Nuñez survives or not is quite immaterial; what really matters for us are the messages and the interesting themes of this marvelous story.

Some of the most prominent themes:

1. The theme of blindness: in the story, we can talk about physical blindness, namely the fact that the inhabitants of this valley are actually blind and have no conception of eyesight. We can also speak about mental blindness, that is to say, neither Nuñez nor the villagers can see beyond their own world; Nuñez is incapable of accepting the fact that these blind people can do without eyesight; the village, on their part view his theories about eyesight as ridiculous.

2. Lack of tolerance and narrow mindedness: instead of trying to understand and accept the villager's world view, Nuñez does all his best to convert them into his own way of thinking; when he fails, he tries to rebel against them. The villagers, on the other hand, render him into a slave because he has tried to upset their beliefs, traditions and customs. They punish him for being a non conformist.

3. Theme of lust for power: this theme is related to Nuñez. The moment he realizes that the dwellers of this valley area blind, he starts rubbing his hands with delight, remembering the old saying: in the country of the blind, the one eyed man is king; in other words Nuñez starts to contemplate the prospect of ruling over these handicapped, disabled people.

4. The theme of disability: in the eyes of Nuñez, the blind people are deprived of their eyesight, therefore life will be difficult for them; however, they prove him wrong by compensating for their lack of eyesight by relying and sharpening their other senses (hearing, smelling, touching, etc). As for the citizens of this valley, it's Nuñez who is handicapped; they say he stumbles; he is incompetent, clumsy and insane. They triumph over him on many occasions ; for example, on their way home, taking Nuñez to see their elders, Nuñez stumbles; when they take him into the dark room, Nuñez falls down whereas the blind people don't.

5 The theme of self knowledge or self discovery: in this story, Nuñez's journey is a journey towards self knowledge and self discovery. Nuñez lives to see and admit his own limitations. He learns to question the validity of many things we take for granted in this life; for example, before his experience in the country of the blind, he used to believe in the truth of the proverb which says: in the country of the blind, the one eyed man is king. His failure to dominate and govern the blind people testifies to the fact that this is not true all the time.

An analysis of Leo Tolstoy's The Coffee House of Surat

The story opens with a description of the setting in terms of place; the events take place in a Coffee house in India. We should bear in mind that India is a place where different religions exist and the coffee place is the ideal place for debate and conversation. The first paragraph on page 13 describes how the theologian is banished from Persia just for being a non believer. It's as if Tolstoy is showing the dangers of intolerance. In this coffee house, we are going to meet different people expressing their views about religion and God. The story begins with a slave and his master about the slave's god; the slave's answer that he worships a piece of wood which he believes gives him protection and brings him good luck. On overhearing the conversation a Brahmin who believes in a god called Brahma, insults the slave by telling him that that Brahim is the only God who has created his temples all over India.

As the Brahmin finishes his point he is answered by a Jew who overheard their-conversation. The Jew claims that the only truthful god is of the Israelites is the only god and he has preferred them and made them the chosen people. The Jew claims that the religion of his forefathers Isaac and Jacob is the only valid religion. After that, a Christian catholic tries to refute (prove wrong) the Jew's argument saying that claiming the fact that god prefers the Jews over other people is equivalent to saying that god is unjust. Furthermore the Jews had angered god and that is why he has scattered them. The catholic claims that only the followers of Jesus Christ will receive god's grace.

On top of page 14. The Turk who is a Muslim and a follower of Islam responds to the catholic by saying his argument is vain (proud and futile). The only truthful religion, according to the Turk is Islam. After that, the theologian intervenes by saying that even inside Islam there are divisions and different sects (Shiites and Sunnis). While the debate or the conversation is taking place, the China man keeps silent (we all know that silence is often associated with wisdom). After being asked and urged by the participants, the Chinese, a follower of Confucius, begins by saying that people are divided because of pride: each one thinks his or her religion is the only right and truthful religion. The China man cleverly uses a story to drive his message home. Therefore we have a story within a story. He shows how different people from different places have different views about the sun; some say the sun is a ball of fire; others say that it shines only on India, some say the sun goes round the earth, others say the opposite. The China man draws the conclusion that god is like the sun: as the sun shines for everybody, so is the case with god; he exists for everybody; as there is only one sun, there is only one god. The China man shows how pride and excessive self-confidence can lead to divisions.

General comments, or major points: the major lesson we draw from this story is that people should be open minded and accept diversity and difference; the dangerous consequences of not accepting each other and being tolerant can lead to violence and war; we have only to look around to see many conflicts taking place in the name of religion. The story also implicitly tries to teach us universal values like peace, respect and self denial. At the end we can also speak about the value of pluralism.