

'Ingrid Jonker' by Sally Bryer

Read the poem on page 244 of *Seasons Come to Pass* several times and then answer the questions that follow. On page 216 of *Seasons Come to Pass* you will find a short biography of the poet after which this poem is named. The inscription of Sally Bryer's poem also provides you with some context as to why this poem might be named after this poet.

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1. *You walked straight into the water*
 2. *like a hungry bird, your curly head*
 3. *intent as a heron.*
 4. *You walked into the waves*
 5. *like Persephone herself,*
 6. *your eyes dried seeds, your body a husk of light.*
 7. *Your punishment was finding yourself*
 8. *in a foreign element. You spoke*
 9. *through interpreters. Your lips and fingers*
 10. *betrayed you, turned away*
 11. *from the darkness behind your eyes*
 12. *tried to sell themselves.*
 13. *Your child dies, and lives on.*
 14. *Your screams become seasonal.*

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15. *We travel in packs. Hunting and hunted*
 16. *we carry nets and each of us captures*
 17. *a relic of pain, stark as bone.*
 18. *Those of us who never saw a likeness*
 19. *learn to tell the seasons of madness*
 20. *from the sea. In every fragment of glass and shell*
 21. *I pass, your dark eyes encounter me.*

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1. Based on this biographical information about Ingrid Jonker, what do you expect this poem to be about specifically?

The poem is about the praise that Ingrid Jonker deserves as a poet. She committed suicide by walking into the sea and drowning. The poem includes her death, the main point of the poem I would say. The poem also includes her struggle that she had against apartheid and what that she was very outspoken and the fact that most of her poems include painful emotion that was very intimate.

2. Who is the 'you' the speaker addresses in line 1 (and throughout the rest of the poem)?

Ingrid Jonker

3. Why do you think the speaker compares the persona to a 'hungry bird' (line 2) and a 'heron' (line 3)? What is the significance of comparing her to these types of birds? What is this type of comparison called?

The speaker compares Ingrid Jonker to the birds, because she recreates Ingrid's death, as Ingrid walked into the sea and committed suicide, hence the "hungry bird" as she was hungry for freedom and she saw death as her escape to freedom. "heron" is a sort of bird that searches for its prey in water, bringing us back to the fact that she drowned herself. The speaker used a simile to compare Ingrid to the birds, as she uses "like" in line 2.

4. Why do you think the speaker compares the persona in the poem to the Greek goddess Persephone? (Look at the footnote on page 244 of *Seasons Come to Pass* to assist you in answering this question.)

The Greek goddess Persephone, must spend each winter by the king of the underworld (the realm of the dead.) Ingrid Jonker committed suicide on 19 July 1965, which is in the winter months of South Africa. Most people think if you commit suicide you will go to "hell" as a punishment for taking your own life. Hence we can see the comparison between each of the figures are very similar to each other as they will end up in the "underworld" at the end."

5. Ingrid Jonker wrote a poem called 'The child who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga' (*Seasons Come to Pass*, p. 216). Is there a reference to Jonker's poem in this poem by Sally Bryer? Explain.

Yes, there is a reference of the poem in line 13. "Your child dies, and lives on." In the poem written by Ingrid, "The child who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga", Ingrid uses a child figure to explain all the innocent deaths that occurred in the apartheid era and in the end "the child" – the small victim of violence – has grown in to a strong power figure who was not limited to unfair rules and regulations by the government and being free.

6. In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker refers to 'we' (line 15) instead of just 'you'. Read this stanza carefully, and explain what the people are busy with here.

A group of people are entering the sea on a search for the body of Ingrid. They are "hunting" the "haunted", I would say it means that they are hunting for Ingrid's body. The group of people carried nets to "fish" out Ingrid's death and each member of the group have received a "memoir" of pain which is Ingrid's body. The people who never liked Ingrid's poems, mainly government, are now sharing her poems and teaching the poems to children and students. And not only her poems but she is the poster child for apartheid poetry. In the last lines, we see that the speaker connects with Ingrid through her place of death, when she visits the place of Ingrid's death everything seems to remind the speaker of the poet.

7. In this poem, Bryer also makes a number of references to a well-known poem written by Ingrid Jonker, translated in English as 'Escape' ('Ontvlugting'). The final two lines of Jonker's poem ends with the words: 'Washed out my body lies in weed and grass/ in all the places where we once did pass'. Do you see a link between these lines by Jonker, and the final two lines of Bryer's poem? Explain. (This is an example of an allusion. The terms 'allusion' and 'intertextuality' are explained on page 142 of *Introduction to English Literary Studies*.)

Yes. In the last lines, we see that the speaker connects with Ingrid through her place of death, when she visits the place of Ingrid's death everything seems to remind the speaker of the poet. "In every fragment of glass and shell" – may mean broken and hurt. "washed out my body lies in weed and grass" Ingrid's body is broken and/or dead. "I pass, your dark eyes encounter me." the speaker is being reminded of Ingrid by everything at her place of death. "in all the place where we once did pass" Ingrid is being reminded, by the place where she was washed up, of all her time together with her lover.