

## Task for *Burial Rites*

### Point of view

In *Burial Rites*, the shifting point of view in the novel – between third and first person – is significant and evident in the following extracts.

In pairs or small groups, closely analyse the extracts below.

For each one, establish:

1. The context of the extract. In which part of the novel is it situated? What is happening immediately before and after the passage? Look at the start of the section before and after to identify the points of view of those sections and therefore recognise the shifts in narration.
2. The point of view from which the extract is written.
3. How Agnes is constructed as an unreliable narrator (if she is).
4. What information or details are we privy to through this point of view?
5. How it influences our response to events and to the characters.

1. The servant gaped at him, and then suddenly laughed. ‘Good Lord,’ he muttered. ‘They pick a mouse to tame a cat.’ And with that he mounted his horse and vanished behind the swell of hills, leaving Tóti standing still, holding the letter away from him as though it were about to catch fire. (p. 10)

2. When I come into the badstofa I see that the officer who was sleeping is gone. He must have joined his friends; I can hear men talking in a mixture of Danish and Icelandic outside the window. They must not have seen the farm mistress push me back inside. The two sleeping daughters have gone also. I'm alone.

*I am alone.* (p. 69)

3. I let my body fall into a rhythm. I sway back and forth and let gravity bring the scythe down and through the grass, until I rock steadily. Until I feel that I am not moving myself, and that the sun is driving me. Until I am a puppet of the wind, and of the scythe, and of the long, slow strokes that propel my body forward. Until I couldn't stop if I wanted to. (p. 103)

4. Agnes gazed straight at Tóti, her finger still against her forehead. He was unnerved by the glitter in her eye, her bloody lip, and wondered if the news of Sigga's appeal had, in fact, made her a little mad.

'What happened?' he asked. (p. 138)

5. Margrét woke to the sound of whimpering. She peered through the darkness to where her daughters lay. They were asleep.

Agnes. (p. 268)

6. Snow lay over the valley like linen, like a shroud waiting for the dead body of sky that slumped overhead.

It's all over, Tóti thought. (p. 325)