

***The Ocean at the End of the Lane* – Neil Gaiman**

In this extract, the unnamed narrator is returning to his childhood hometown for a funeral.

The little country lane of my childhood had become a black tarmac road that swerved as a buffer between two sprawling housing estates.

What is the initial focus of the text? Why is the writer focusing your attention on this?

I drove further down it, away from the town, which was not the way I should have been travelling, and it felt good.

The slick black road became narrower, windier, became the single-lane track I remembered from my childhood, became packed earth and knobbly, bone-like flints.

Soon I was driving slowly, bumpily, down a narrow lane with brambles and briar roses on each side, wherever the edge was not a stand of hazels or a wild hedgerow. It felt like I had driven back in time.

How is the initial focus developed? What structural feature is evident at this point?

I remembered it before I turned the corner and saw it, in all its dilapidated red-brick glory: the Hempstocks' farmhouse.

It took me by surprise, although that was where the lane had always ended. I could have gone no further. I parked the car at the side of the farmyard. I had no plan. I wondered whether, after all these years, there was anyone still living there, or, more precisely, if the Hempstocks were still living there. It seemed unlikely, but then, from what little I remembered, they had been unlikely people.

What is the writer focusing you on now? Why this particular focus?

The stench of cow muck struck me as I got out of the car, and I walked gingerly across the small yard to the front door. I looked for a doorbell, in vain, and then I knocked. The door had not been latched properly, and it swung gently open as I rapped it with my knuckles.

How is this focus developed?

I had been here, hadn't I, a long time ago? I was sure I had. Childhood memories are sometimes covered and obscured beneath the things that come later, like childhood toys forgotten at the bottom of a crammed adult closet, but they are never lost for good.

What does the writer focus your attention on at the end of the text? How are you left thinking/feeling at the end? Why might the writer have sought to bring you to this point of interest / understanding?

How is the text structured overall? What is the overall effect on you?

**azalea:** brightly coloured flower

**dilapidated:** in a state of ruin as a result of age or neglect

**gingerly:** in a careful or cautious manner

**obscured:** hidden