POSTCOLONIAL WRITINGS
[ENG2C08]

STUDY MATERIAL

II SEMESTER
CORE COURSE

MA ENGLISH
(2019 Admission onwards)

UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
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SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
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ENG2C08 : POSTCOLONIAL WRITINGS

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CONTENTS

SECTION A: POETRY

1. A K RAMANUJAN: “SELF-PORTRAIT”
2. DOM MORAES: “A LETTER”
   “SINBAD”
3. LEOPOLD SENGHOR: “NEW YORK”
4. GABRIEL OKARA: “THE MYSTIC DRUM”
5. DAVID DIOP: “AFRICA”
6. ALLEN CURNOW: “HOUSE AND LAND”
7. A D HOPE: “AUSTRALIA”
8. JACK DAVIS: “ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA”
9. MARGARET ATWOOD: “JOURNEY TO THE INTERIOR”
10. DEREK WALCOTT: “RUINS OF A GREAT HOUSE”
11. EE TIANG HONG: “ARRIVAL”
12. ALMAGHIR HASHMI: “SO WHAT IF I LIVE IN A HOUSE MADE BY IDIOTS?”
13. KAMAU BRATHWAITE: “NEGUS”

SECTION B

1. WOLE SOYINKA: THE ROAD
2. GIRISH KARNAD: HAYAVADANA
3. TIMBERLAKE
   WERTENBAKER: OUR COUNTRY’S GOOD

SECTION C

1. CHINUA ACHEBE: THINGS FALL APART
2. V. S NAIPAUL: A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS
3. MARGARET LAWRENCE: THE STONE ANGEL
4. KHALED HOSSEINI: THE KITE RUNNER
INTRODUCTION

POSTCOLONIALISM

We encounter a remarkably wide range of literary texts that come from parts of the world as varied as India, West Indies, Africa, Canada, Australia and South America against the backdrop of colonialism and resistance to colonialism, cultural legacies of colonialism as well as those who want to actively engage with the process of decolonization or think through the process of decolonization.

Postcolonial literature is a fast expanding field of literary studies and just the number of academic journals, of books, of monograph series, of conference proceedings that are regularly brought out with the word postcolonial or postcolonialism in their title and that very number is now mind boggling.

The term postcolonialism is composed of two different elements. The major element is the word “colonialism” but there is also a very important prefix attached to the word which is “post”. The prefix “post” adds an important dimension to our understanding. In the dictionary, generally, the meaning is “behind or after”. If we attach it after a noun then ‘post’ indicates something that happens or comes after the event.

Postcolonial means “after colonialism”. Generally, the term refers to the period after a former colony gains its independence. For instance, India became postcolonial in 1947, when it became a nation of its own and stopped being a colony of the British Empire. But “postcolonial” refers to more than just the formation of an independent government. Colonialism exists as ideologies and practices that assume supremacy of the colonizing culture and these do not end when the colonialists leave. Rather, “postcolonial” may refer best to the time period when a previously colonized culture grapples with the meaning of its identity as an independent entity. What language will a postcolonial society speak? Would that be of the colonizers, which had been the official language, or any indigenous languages? How will the history of the postcolonial nation be taught in their schools or in the schools of the colonizing country? Much postcolonial literary theory examines how authors deal with the issues and contradictions of life in formerly colonized cultures.

Postcolonial theory takes many different shapes and interventions, but all share a fundamental claim and we cannot understand except in relationship to the history of imperialism and colonial rule. This means that it is impossible to conceive of “European philosophy”, “European literature”, or “European history”
as existing in the absence of Europe’s colonial encounters and oppression around the world. It also suggests that colonized world stands at the forgotten center of global modernity. The prefix “post” of postcolonial theory has been sensibly debated, but it has never implied that colonialism has ended. Indeed, much of postcolonial theory is concerned with the lingering forms of colonial authority after the formal end of Empire. Postcolonial theory emerged in the US and UK academies in the 1980s as part of a larger wave of new and politicized fields of humanistic inquiry, most notably feminism and critical race theory.

As it is generally established, postcolonial theory emerges from and is deeply indebted to anticolonial thought from South Asia and Africa in the first half of the 20th century, especially theory emerging from Latin and South America. Over the last four decades, it has remained simultaneously attached to the fact of colonial rule in the first half of the 20th century and devoted to politics and justice in the contemporary scenario. It has taken multiple forms:

- It has been concerned with forms of political and aesthetic representation;
- It has been dedicated to accounting for globalization and global modernity;
- It has been invested in reimagining politics and ethics from underneath imperial power, an effort that remains steadfast to those who continue to suffer its effects; and
- It has been interested in continually discovering and theorizing new forms of human injustice, from environmentalism to human rights.

Postcolonial theory is centrally concerned with examining the mechanisms through which the colonizing powers persuaded the colonized people to accept a foreign culture as ‘better’ than their own original methods of government and social organization. Among the most important kinds of power/knowledge brought by the colonizers was the construction of the concept of ‘race’, and more specifically the racial binary opposition of ‘white’ and ‘other’ – be that other ‘black’, ‘yellow’, ‘brown’, ‘red’, or whatever other colour became the signifier for the ‘otherness’ of the colonized people. In the case of the United States, the ‘native’ population was itself defined as white.

Postcolonial theory has influenced the way we read texts, the way we understand national and transnational histories, and the way we understand the political implications of our own knowledge as scholars. Therefore, postcolonial theory remains one of the key forms of critical humanistic interrogation in both academia and in the world.

Some important terms to be noted under postcolonialism:
SUBALTERN
A term taken from the colonial military context meaning a non-white soldier of inferior rank, which is used in postcolonial theory to denote a member of the colonized population. Gayatri Spivak uses the term specifically to refer to the lowest layers of a colonial or postcolonial society: the homeless, the day labourers, the unemployed, arguing that these subaltern populations are voiceless and invisible in both colonial and post- or neocolonial cultures. In her article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Spivak focuses on women as subalterns in debates between British and Indian cultures around the issue of sati or widow-burning; women themselves do not participate, from either perspective, in the debate.

HYBRIDITY
In the postmodern sense, a hybrid is any phenomenon that mixes elements from two distinct traditions or practices. Most post-structuralist theory, for instance, is a hybrid of various modes of thought or disciplines: psychoanalytic, Marxist, linguistic, anthropological, literary. Hybridity often causes deconstruction. Hybridity often comes up in postcolonial theory as a way to describe emerging forms of identity and status that arise in the postcolonial and postmodern world. Homi Bhabha discusses hybridity as the place between two conflicting cultures or moments, when identities are destabilized and deconstructed.

One is a hybrid if one belongs to more than one identity category, such as being Islamic (religious) and Turkish (national). Identity categories based on race, class, gender, and nationality, Bhabha argues, are continually being challenged and undermined by hybridity, by people who move across boundaries and inhabit the in between spaces of cultures. The counterattack to postmodern hybridity is the attempt to purify a race, culture, or ethnicity, often by genocide; ‘ethnic cleansing’ to eliminate people who do not fit within single identity categories is an attempt to eradicate hybridity.

ORIENTALISM
As described by postcolonial theorist Edward Said, Orientalism can be defined as the process of making something or someone “oriental”. Like Foucault, Said describes this as a discursive process—Western European explorers went to a place they called “the Orient” and wrote descriptions and understood “the Orient” as something other than their own country and civilization.

“Orient” in English means ‘East’. East and West are relative terms, not absolutes; they require a fixed position to have meaning. In the colonial era, this fixed position was Greenwich, England, the home port
of the British Royal Navy. Said talks about how the West constructed the East through discourse, where the colonizer produces the writing and the colonized is silent. The colonized people do not produce knowledge, but are only the subject of knowledge produced by the colonizer. When the West writes the East, the writings create the “oriental” as fundamentally “other”. The negative binary opposite of “civilization” are sexual exoticism, drug use, immorality, lack of organization, ignorance, poverty and is associated with the “oriental” in this construction.

In Orientalism (1978), Said provides a critical analysis of the Western construction of ‘oriental’ culture in the guise of academic study. In Said’s Culture and Imperialism (1993), he argues that the construction of African or Indian identity in the novelistic works of Jane Austen or Joseph Conrad, can be read as being concerned in the domination of colonial forms of power.

POSTCOLONIAL ALLEGORY
The simplest definition of allegory is a ‘symbolic narrative’ in which the major features of the movement of the narrative are all held to refer symbolically to some action or situation. This becomes particularly significant for postcolonial writers for the way in which it disrupts notions of orthodox history, classical realism and imperial representation. Paintings and statues have often been created as allegories of imperial power.

Fredric Jameson made a controversial suggestion in Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-national Capitalism (1986), that all Third World literatures are ‘necessarily’ national allegories. Aijaz Ahmad strongly criticized the homogenizing nature of this statement (In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures). But Stephen Slemon suggests that we might rather see allegory as a function of the ‘conditions of postcoloniality’. This is because allegory has always been a dominant mode of colonial representation and therefore becomes a particularly valuable form in which postcolonial literature may conduct forms of counter-discourse.

This means, firstly, that postcolonial cultures may use allegory to ‘read’ the text of colonialism. many ways are used by postcolonial writers.

ALTERITY
The term was adopted by philosophers as an alternative to “otherness” to register a change in the Western perceptions of the relationship between consciousness and the world. Since Descartes, individual
consciousness had been taken as the privileged starting point for consciousness, and “the other” appears in these post-Enlightenment philosophies as a reduced “other”, as an epistemological question. That is, in a concept of the human in which everything stems from the notion that ‘I think, therefore I am’, the chief concern with the other is to be able to answer questions such as ‘How can I know the other?’, ‘How can other minds be known?’

The term ‘alterity’ shifts the focus of analysis away from these philosophic concerns with otherness, the other who is actually located in a political, cultural, linguistic or religious context. This is a key feature of changes in the concept of subjectivity, because, whether seen in the context of ideology, psychoanalysis or discourse, the ‘construction’ of the subject itself can be seen to be inseparable from the construction of its others.

Literary theorists commonly see the most influential use of alterity in Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of the way in which an author moves away from identification with a character (Todorov 1984). The novelist must understand his or her character from within, as it were, and also, he or she must perceive it as other, as apart from its creator in its distinct alterity. Importantly, dialogue is only possible with an ‘other’, so alterity, in Bakhtin’s formulation, is not simply ‘exclusion’, but an individuality that stands as a precondition of dialogue, where dialogue implies a transference across and between differences of culture, gender, class and other social categories. This is related to his concept of ‘exotopy’ or ‘outsideness’, which is not simply alienness, but a precondition for the author’s ability to understand and formulate a character, a prerequisite for dialogue itself.

In post-colonial theory, the term has often been used interchangeably with otherness and difference. However, the distinction that initially held between otherness and alterity is peculiarly applicable to postcolonial discourse. According to Spivak, alterity is determined by a process of othering.

AMBIVALENCE

A term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action. Homi K Bhabha is one of the important theorists of ambivalence. It describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to
the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself as nurturing, at the same time.

Most significantly in Bhabha’s theory, however, ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disturbs the simple relationship between colonizer and colonized. The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values, that is, ‘mimic’ the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject. The effect of this ambivalence is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse.

Ambivalence, therefore, gives rise to a controversial proposition in Bhabha’s theory as it implies that the colonial relationship is going to be interrupted, irrespective of any resistance or rebellion on the part of the colonized.

In short, ambivalence is an ambiguous way in which colonized and colonizer regard one another. Colonizers often regard colonizers as both privileged yet unethical.

**APPROPRIATION**

A term used to describe the ways in which postcolonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture – language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis – that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities.

It is in broader and deeper level a two part process – abrogation and appropriation, a sort of hybridization or accommodation. It is used in juxtaposition with abrogation. An act of appropriation happens when the native writers, artists even politicians appropriate or use languages in the ways of expressing introduced by the colonizers in their works and in their political speeches but then infuse it with the local traditions and customs. Native writers creatively use English and can become a weapon of postcolonialism. But, by and large, they are not trying absolutely replace the language of the colonizers. They are actually mastering it and using it. In other words, “to dismantle the master’s house with his or her own tools”. In literary tradition, these are the people wo use the Western languages, French, Italian, English, to tell stories or write stories. The stories would be of their native culture or may be the contact phase of their
culture with the colonizers, but they would also show a certain degree of mastery of the language. It can be revolutionary as well.

Now, there is a debate, especially, in African postcolonial studies about whether or not appropriation is good or fit for the post colony. Chinua Achebe (quoting James Baldwin), noted that the language so used can ‘bear the burden of another experience’, and this has become one of the most famous declarations of the power of appropriation in postcolonial discourse. However, the very use of the colonial language has been opposed by writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who, after a successful career as a writer in English, has renounced the language of the former colonizer to write his novel and plays in Gikuyu. Nevertheless, Ngugi continues to appropriate the novel form itself, and it has been argued that the very success of his political tactic of renouncing English has relied on his reputation as a writer in that tongue.

Many other non-English speaking writers who have chosen to write in English do so not because their mother tongue is regarded by them as inadequate, but because the colonial language has become a useful means of expression, and one that reaches the widest possible audience. On the other hand, writers such as Ngugi argue that since access to English in the post-colonial societies themselves is often restricted to an educated elite, this wider audience is largely outside the country. The debate has been a persistent and unresolved one.

These arguments based on the political effect of choosing English as a medium of expression are frequently contested by the alternative claim that language itself somehow embodies a culture in a way that is inaccessible to speakers of another language.

Many writers feel encouraging translation between all the languages used in the various postcolonial literature and it is equally important to insist on the need for metropolitan institutions and cultural practices to open themselves up to indigenous texts by encouraging the learning and use of these languages by metropolitan scholars.

On the whole, appropriation happens when the natives of the colonized cultures learn the language of their colonial masters and then start producing literature or art and that act can be revolutionary. In other words, to appropriate / re-define means ‘to kill the master with master’s tool’.
BINARISM

Binary means a combination of two things, a pair, ‘two’, duality (OED). This is a widely used term with distinctive meaning in several fields and one that has had particular sets of meanings in postcolonial theory.

The concern with binarism was first established by the French structural linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, who held that signs have meaning, but by their opposition to other signs. Each sign is the function of a binary between the signifier, the ‘signal’ or sound image of the word, and the signified, the significance of the signal, the concept or mental image that it evokes. Saussure held that although the connection between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, once the link is established, it is fixed for everyone who speaks that language.

The binary opposition is the most extreme form of difference possible – sun/moon; man/woman; birth/death; black/white. Such oppositions, each of which represents a binary system, are very common in the cultural construction of reality. The problem with such binary systems is that they suppress ambiguous spaces between the opposed categories, so that any overlapping region that may appear, say, between the categories man/woman, child/adult or friend/alien, becomes impossible according to binary logic, and a region of taboo in social experience.

The binary opposition itself exists to confirm that dominance. This means that any activity or state that does not fit the binary opposition will become subject to repression or ritual. For instance, the interstitial stage between child and adult. Subsequently, the state between the binarism, such as the binary colonizer/colonized, will evidence the signs of extreme ambivalence manifested in mimicry, cultural schizophrenia, or various kinds of obsession with identity, or will put energy into confirming one or other side of the binarism, e.g. Anglocentrism or nationalism. A simple distinction between centre /margin; colonizer /colonized; metropolis /empire; civilized /primitive represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively disseminates. Binary oppositions are structurally related to one another.

The binary constructs a scandalous category between the two terms that will be the domain of taboo, but the structure can be read downwards as well as across, so that colonizer, white, human and beautiful are collectively opposed to colonized, black, bestial and ugly. Clearly, the binary is very important in constructing ideological meanings in general, and extremely useful in imperial ideology. Thus, we may
also find that colonizer, civilized, teacher and doctor may be opposed to colonized, primitive, pupil and patient, as a comparatively effortless extension of the binary structure of domination.

It may be argued that the very domain of postcolonial theory is the region of ‘taboo’- the domain of overlap between these imperial binary oppositions, the area in which ambivalence, hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties of imperial logic. Apart from illuminating the interstitial spaces, postcolonial theory also disrupts the structural relations of the binary system itself, revealing the fundamental contradictions of a system that can include, for instance, the binaries civilized/primitive or human/bestial along with doctor/ patient or enlightener/enlightened. In this way it uncovers the deep ambivalence of a structure of economic, cultural and political relations that can both debase and idealize, demonize and eroticize its subjects.

Perhaps one of the most catastrophic binary systems perpetuated by imperialism is the invention of the concept of race. The reduction of complex physical and cultural differences within and between colonized societies to the simple opposition of black /brown /yellow /white is in fact a strategy to establish a binarism of white /non-white, which asserts a relation of dominance. The danger for anti-colonial resistance comes when the binary opposition is simply reversed, so that ‘black’, for instance, or ‘the colonized’ become the dominant terms. Much contemporary postcolonial theory has been directed at breaking down various kinds of binary separation in the analysis of colonialism and imperialism.

Imperial binarism always assume a movement in one direction – a movement from the colonizer to the colonized, from the explorer to the explored, from the surveyor to the surveyed. But just as postcolonial identity emerges in the ambivalent spaces of the colonial encounter, so the dynamic of change is not all in one direction. It is in fact transcultural, with a significant circulation of effects back and forth between the two, for the engagement with the colonies became an increasingly important factor in the imperial society’s constitution and understanding of itself.

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- Nayar, K. Promod. Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism
• Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair. *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*
SECTION A
POETRY
A.K. RAMANUJAN (1929-1993)

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan, like most other poets writing in English, is bilingual. He writes both in Kannada and in English. Some of his finest works consist of translations from Tamil and Kannada into English. He is a well-known poet, folklorist, scholar, playwright, and philologist.

He was born in Mysore in 1929. He received his education first at D. Bhanumaiab’s High School, and then at Maharaja College, Mysore. After completing his education, he was a fellow at Deccan College, Poona from 1958 to 1959. Later he received the ‘Fulbright Fellowship’ and worked at Indiana University (U.S.A) from 1960-62. He also worked as a lecturer in English literature for some time at the universities of Belgaum and Baroda. Later, he served as the professor of Dravidian studies and linguistics at the University of Chicago, U.S.A. Hence, he is a voluntary exile from India. His essentially Indian sensibility has enabled him to go to India’s past and his sense of Indian history and tradition is unique. The past comes to life in his poetry, and this “presence of the past”, might not have been possible had he continued to live in India.

A.K Ramanujan’s art is almost perfect but his poetic output is very thin. He has to his credit only two slender volumes of poetry. The Striders (1966) and Relations: Poems (1971). Select Poems (1976) contains a selection of poems from both these volumes. He is also an excellent translator. His forte is translation into English from Kannada and Tamil. His well-known translations include Fifteen Tamil Poems (1965), The Interior landscape (1967), Speaking of Siva (1972), Samskara (1976). He had also contributed to a number of literary journals and magazines during his stay in the U.S.A for over fifteen years. His Kannada poetry is collected in No Lotus in the Navel (1969). He also brought U R Ananthamurthy’s Samskara international recognition by translating it into English in 1976.

Towards the end of his life, Ramanujan turned his attention to another rich area of Indian life and culture, folklore. One of his last publications was Folktales from India (1994), a selection of oral narratives from twenty-two Indian languages.

One can find elements of hardened skepticism in his poetry. His use of tradition is ironic. Thus, his poetry is known for its irony and ambiguity. Besides, he uses his experience as an expatriate to interrogate the value of both the motherland, India and the adopted country, USA.
SELF- PORTRAIT

(The poem)

I resemble everyone
but myself, and sometimes see
in shop-windows
despite the well-known laws
of optics,
the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

This short poem is from his collection *The Striders* (1966). The poem conveys a universal theme not only
in his poetry but in modern poetry in general. The self-portrait is a popular device used by modern painters
in which the painter paints himself. It is almost equivalent to a literary autobiography. For instance, ‘Self
-portraits’ of Van Gogh exposes a lot about the painter. This idea is used by Ramanujan in the poem to
question the notion of the self, not just to describe the self.

According to Ramanujan, there is strangeness to oneself which is brought home when one suddenly
encounters one’s reflection, as in the glass windows of a shop. The poet says that he resembles anyone
but himself. This implies that he is a stranger to himself.

Self – estrangement is a recurrent theme in modern literature. It occurs because of a variety of factors,
but all these involve some sort of displacement or dislocation which is also the characteristics of modern
life. In Ramanujan’s case this is true as he moves across countries (from Indian to USA and vice-versa),
cultures, and languages. Even then, the last line of the poem suggests that this self-estrangement is not
total. Instead, he marks the signature of his father in the corner of the portrait. The “author”, therefore, is
the father and the portrait not dated. But this attribution of authorship to the father is more of a trick,
because not only the “real” author of the poem Ramanujan himself, but so is the supposed author within
the poem, the poet who perceives himself.

In the end, then, the poem ends up meaning something differently from what it states in the beginning.
For instance, even to claim that one does not resemble oneself, one would have to know what one looks
like, i.e., self-recognition. Even in the act of self-deny. Then, after having made his own portrait, as of someone resembling himself, the poet attributes it to his father, thus suggesting not that he does not resemble himself so much as he is not really what is father scripted. The portrait of himself drawn by his father is that of a stranger. In other words, “the real” Ramanujan is different from what his father intended or even what Ramanujan’s image in the glass suggests. The poem, to put it differently, is one that through its gesture of self-deny suggests of a self-affirmation of a different kind. What this self is, in the modernist fashion is never stated. Instead, through denials and evasions an escape from the “official” self is affected.

**TO SUM UP**

This poem is the best example for identity crisis. The poem is written in free verse style and is in first person narration. This can be considered as an autobiographical poem. The poem began in a dissatisfied tone and by the end he rediscovered his identity. Society values a person through his identity. Quest for identity is shown in the first line, he sees himself through others and this implies loss of individuality.

The image of window glass is important. He sees his own reflection through the window glass and does not admit it as his own reflection. The window glass symbolizes the capitalist world spread by the western world and in a way symbolizes the attitude, character, or identity built by capitalist possessions. Besides, mental dilemma is revealed. Later, he observes the portrait closely. Date unknown refers to the poet’s inability to find his original self. Just like the sculptor inscribes his signature on the sculpture, the poem is also signed in a corner. The signature can be interpreted in two ways: 1) he discovered his identity. 2) his identity is created by his father. In an Indian society, a child is known through his father. This shows the dominance of patriarchy in India. In short, the meaninglessness of life is portrayed through the poem.

Major themes discussed in the poem are struggle of modern man for identity. Man forgets to be himself. Man shows a different face to the capitalist society. By acting different he loses his own identity. He tries to discover his original self, the one which he really is without materialism. And also, fusion of cultures can be seen in this poem.

**Further Reading:**

- [https://www.academia.edu/4921485/Self_Portrait_By_Ramanujan_A_Critical_Analysis](https://www.academia.edu/4921485/Self_Portrait_By_Ramanujan_A_Critical_Analysis)
DOM MORAES (1938-2004)

Dominic Francis Moraes was born in Bombay into a Roman Catholic family. His father was Frank Moraes, the journalist and editor. His mother Beryl De Monte was a doctor whose mental breakdowns and violence he obsessively revisited in poetry and prose. He began writing at the age of ten, and, three years later, published his first book, a collection of essays on cricket titled *Green is the Grass*. His first book of poems, *A Beginning*, appeared when he was nineteen. It won him deserved if disastrous early fame, via the Hawthornden Prize. He published two more collections before running into a writer’s block, but only about poetry. Despite the block- which lasted fifteen years – he published ten volumes of poems, two of translations from Hebrew, and more than twenty books of prose. Between the assured romanticism of this early poem and the stripped-down sonnets of his last work, ‘After the Operation’, there occurred a world of travel, prose writing, resurgence, and regret. He travelled with his father throughout Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, Australia and New Zealand. His autobiographies are *My Son’s Father* (1968) and *Never at Home* (1992). He died in Bombay in 2004.

SINBAD

(Poem)

Winds sniffed, the graves
Of the sea identified
Numbered still the tickled waves
Fumbling, toss of the head

Sinbad, your trips!
Diamonds clawed by
vultures!
Flying over defunct
Countries
you need raw colours for
new maps
old friends folding up in strange places.
New friends holding out hearts
Bronze breasts iced in white laces
cold cups of kindness

choose your rock, seamate, stay with it
Lose your shadow, its of no use
the last bronze bird puts you down,
tidier than a horse, final

Ashed and marred walls deface you.
Where is this wind from, Sinbad, defining its own course?
Some of us never know home

EXPLANATION
Sinbad is a poem that describes his journey in life. Sinbad referred to here is a character in the Arabian Nights. Sinbad, the Sailor (his name is also spelled as ‘Sindbad’) dominates a cycle of seven stories in the Arabian Nights. In the story, Sinbad appears as a merchant, a prominent citizen of the prosperous and glamorous Baghdad of Caliph Haroun al – Rashid. In his old age, he shares the narratives of his seven voyages with a circle of friends and acquaintances. He speaks of his travels in strange lands, the adventures and mishaps that befell him in the course of these journeys, the customs and ceremonials of the people he met, and the strange and often terrifyingly dangerous creatures he encountered, such as the great bird known as the roc and whale that was mistaken for an island.

Although the poem addresses Sinbad and his experiences over the seas, Dom Moraes is symbolically referring to the eventful life he led and the weird and adventurous experiences he had met in his life. His
autobiography is fused with Sinbad’s (“flying over defunct countries”). His thoughts turning towards the notion of home, the speaker counsels Sinbad.

The poem has five stanzas. In the first stanza the poet narrates the experiences of Sinbad during his voyages. As mentioned earlier, Sinbad had seven voyages and all these were through turbulent seas, tempestuous conditions which took the toll of many of his companions. The beginning (“winds sniffed”) of the poem suggests that during his voyages the wind took him to different directions and has taken the life of many of his friends. “The grave” could refer to the death of his own friends as well as it could mean that he was a person who never visited a place twice. That place would become part of his dreams. He always wanted to have novel experiences in his life and that is why he had one voyage followed by another voyage and that too to different places. In this stanza, Dom Moraes depicts his hybrid identity and his own rootlessness. He is comparing himself with the legendary sailor Sinbad because Dom Moraes also had varied kinds of experiences in his life and Sinbad here incorporates the seas he has explored to his life. He cannot separate himself from the voyages. The seas toss his memories like the fellow mariners of Sinbad whom he had lost in his dangerous adventures.

In the second stanza the speaker of the poem explains about the weird experiences of Sinbad. “Sinbad your trips! / Diamonds clawed by / vultures” is a paradoxical statement. It is because the vultures usually feed on the dead. In one of his journeys Sinbad was taken to a diamond island but that immense wealth caused him his own companions. The speaker says Sinbad’s trips lead him to defunct countries which are colourless and bleak. Sinbad’s adventurous spirit leads him to unknown islands and draws maps with raw colours and he is the first explorer ever to step on those strange nameless countries. The speaker says that Sinbad sails over defunct countries which are not active or the countries no longer exist. For that he has to draw his own maps with his own colours because rest of the world do not know them. The poet’s own alienation from the world he lives in is referred to here.

In the third stanza, the speaker talks about the learnings that Sinbad had through his different voyages. His journeys taught Sinbad the value of true friends as friends sometimes become foes and strangers embrace him with warmth of friendship. “Bronze breasts” refers to the wrong friendships and that are compared to that of icing on a cake. Outwardly they show love but not true at heart. Besides, Sinbad had come across “cold cups of kindness” from unexpected quarters in his voyages. These are some of the learnings Sinbad had during his voyages.
In the fourth stanza, the speaker gives pieces of advice to Sinbad and asks him to choose his own ways and to choose his own directions and follow his own truth. The speaker also asks him to choose his own friends and seamates and to stay with them. He is also asked to “lose his own shadow”. “Shadow” could refer to his own beliefs, customs that he has inherited from his own community. For undertaking a journey, it is better to shed all the traditions. It is of no use when you die. “The last bronze bird” could refer to death, that is, when death puts you down it is the end of the life and nothing can be done thereafter. So, what is desirable is that “choose your rock, seamate and then stay with it” as well as lose all those shadows that are there with you because it is of no use. So here, the poet advices Sinbad to go ahead in his life without being tied up to anything in life rather to follow his aim and his direction along with his true companions. Moreover, ‘Sinbad’, the sailor carried away by the immense bird, is an obvious symbol for the poet as world traveller, isolated, exiled ill at ease in a home that is not his home.

In the last stanza, the speaker says that when you burn and destroy the walls you lose your identity. It means that when you transcend boundaries, it defaces you. It means that you lose your identity that connects you to a particular place, community or tradition and thus become universal. Thus, the poet concludes “some of us never know home”. It means that since you let go off your boundaries, you never know home as you travel to the places where the wind takes you.

In short, the poem depicts Dom Moraes’ search for identity, his sense of rootlessness and his love for embracing varieties and multiplicities of life.

**Further Reading:**
A LETTER
DOM MORAES

A LETTER
EXPLANATION

“A letter” (published in Poem in 1960), although arguably an existential poem, draws on Morae’s biographical experiences. Thus, the tone of the poem is more personal and intimate than that of his other poems. Rather than illustrating a point about human nature in short, he recounts his struggles with anxiety and despair stemming from his inability to find a cultural identity, and how this results in a perpetual sense of alienation, deeply characteristic of Modernist works.

Moraes begins the poem by establishing a setting where the speaker feels alienated. Significantly, the poem is set in India where the class and caste divides are set in stone and create rifts in society. The description of “hot verandas where chauffeurs drowse” evokes concrete imagery of a tropical heat so intense that it drives people to sleep. This immediately suggests the poet’s own unease and discomfort with the land of his birth, which leads to an overall rejection of all it contains. This also conveys to the readers that he grew up on the advantaged end of a class spectrum. His backyard is described as a “ragged thorn’s dominion”. Here the thorn, a threatening symbol of danger, has complete control over a backyard that is supposed to be his dominion. Ragged also recalls people of a lower class, with the torn suggesting they have the capacity to hurt and revolt against their masters. The home is overrun with these people who have established their dominion in a space that is meant to be his space of comfort.

Reinforcing this idea, his house is run by “nameless servants” which indicates the distance and lack of personal connection between him and those in his home. Interestingly, he also refers to it as “his father’s house”, which indicates he has not adopted it as his own. The “backyard dirt where they whisper” has undertones of his servants conspiring against the family, and indicates the hostility between them and him. Here, the whispering of the lower class is almost implied the separation of his parents.

After leaving his home, the description of the poem “growing like maggots in his head” suggests he began to write poetry as a means of catharsis. His poems were not beautiful and aesthetic, but emotionally complex. Just as maggots consume flesh, the flesh of his thoughts was devoured by his poetry. It seems
ironic that poetry, a form so artistic and precise, has such animalistic associations. However, this highlights the traumas of his childhood that his poems helped him cope with. Later, the personification in “each gun talking to me” suggests he was disturbed by the violence in his homeland, confused about his identity. The image of both “green and dung smeared plains in his homeland” depicts a contrast between beauty and ugliness, entirely reflective of elements of his life that were both beautiful and ugly in his birth country. This instantaneous repulsion and attraction he feels indicate his complex relationship with India.

The setting of the poem changes to England, and although the speaker migrates for a new beginning, he grieves at the still-powerful sense of isolation. His description of life in England as “an infant’s trip where many knew to walk” represents his frustration at his own inexperience and vulnerability in contrast to others who were accustomed to the rhythm of life. The verb choice of him “stumbling dumbly”, indicates that his lack of control is creating an exasperated sense of helplessness. His recounting of the humdrum rhythm of life and having to learn the “literature, drink, talk, talk”, emphasizes his view that these activities were a “waste of breath” and suggests his existential angst. Moraes uses pathetic fallacy here to highlight his sense of despair. The gloom of the “English rain” is reflective of his bleak and desolate outlook on life. Interestingly, the cold English rain is the antithesis to the hot Indian sun, and yet he feels comfortable in neither setting. This represents his inability to find the comfort and solace of home in either England or India.

The image of the “English Valleys” which are “full of death” being “too wild and too walled” suggests he is both too restrained and too uncontrolled. The binary opposition between freedom and restraint again reflects his sense of unhappiness at living in either extreme. These valleys are metaphorically representing the setting in which he explores England’s “literature, drink, talk”. This setting holds the propensity for his self-destruction, as he is both encouraged by excessive freedom to explore these English customs, while being limited by the need to conform. These oppositions heighten his despair in England.

A turning point in the poem, is when the speaker begins to find solace in the advice of an older poet. This poet, with his “conversation like an avalanche” suggests that the poet persona is bombarded with information, by his exotic mentor, made garrulous because of his consumption of alcohol. The mentor is described as a “tuskless elephant” indicating that he is large and imposing, but past his prime, now a “wrinkled and heaving dying poet”. On the advice of the poet, he looks for love, which turns into
heartbreak. From this point onwards, his constant search for love and lust becomes a repetitive motif – there is a lacuna in his life, which he is trying to fill with love.

The tone of celebration of his “first love” is immediately contrasted by his disillusionment when the love does not flourish. As a result, he “staggers through bars as a drunken king” which represents a reversion to a dissolute life without boundaries. The metaphor of “naked valleys shaken with alarms” represent warnings that he was headed down the path of self- destruction. The word “naked” also conjures the image of sexual encounters afforded by his boundless freedom. It seems that during these encounters the speaker is disturbed by humdrum aspects of the real world that impinge on his pleasure, represented by the sound of the physical alarm that shakes him out of his libidinous escapades.

However, there is heavy irony attached to the freedom of his over indulgent life. Because of ideas asked to him from youth about ideal love and the perfect union, his encounters are entirely restricted by his expectation of what love should be, recalling the idea that his life is both too wild and too bounded. As a result, he cannot completely embrace his encounters, and begins to see them as “hawks” and “serpents”. These are predatory, poisonous creatures and symbolize the destruction they would have brought to his life. Sexual encounters, which could be considered liberating to some, can never be satisfying or bring him joy because of his traditional mindset about life, and his attempt to replicate the love he once had with his lover. This also marks a shift in the poem, from a speaker struggling with an over indulgent life, to one who begins to contemplate “the image of his lover in his arms”, idealizing what seems to be a mythical lover.

As the speaker imagines an “image” of his lover, this conveys immediately to the readers that this over, was simply a part of his past. There is a silent despair associated with the fact that his “sail was driven to loneliness”. Here the extended metaphor of navigation indicates he navigated himself towards loneliness, and sacrificed his relationship by giving up on his love and resorting to various encounters. As a result, the speaker abandons the “westward haven”, a symbol for the utopian world and perfect love he yearned for. Instead, he now lives in idealist memories of the past and what could have been. He now makes a “landfall” in a beautiful, idealistic dream. The image of him settling near a gentle river, where the swan sleeps with “her young under her wings” evokes visual imagery of an Arcadia, where the external love, domesticity and wedded bliss. As a result, by the end of the poem, the poet’s despair finally shifts to envying but peaceful resignation. He finally accepts a life where he can only experience this love as an
idealistic dream. With this conclusion to the poem, Moraes conveys the power of despair to the reader, both as a catalyst for change and for the acceptance of a new reality.

Further Reading:

- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322690395_Establishing_presence_through_absence.Dom_Moraes's_ambivalence_towards_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322690395_Establishing_presence_through_absence.Dom_Moraes's_ambivalence_towards_India)
LEOPOLD SENGHOR (1906-2001)

Leopold Sedar Senghor was a Senegalese poet, politician, and cultural theorist. Ideologically an African socialist, he was associated with the Negritude movement. He was the founder of the Senegalese Democratic Bloc party.

Leopold Senghor was born near Dakar in the town of Joal to a Fulbe mother and a Serer trader father. He was educated at the Ecole Nationale de la France d’Outre-Mer in Paris. After earning his French citizenship, Senghor taught in Tours and Paris. During World War II, he joined the French Army and spent 18 months in a German prison camp. After serving successive terms representing Senegal in the French National Assembly, Senghor returned to his native land, where he led his nation’s independence movement in 1960. He eventually became Senegal’s first democratically elected president, a post which he held for the next twenty years.

Senghor’s political and literary careers were indistinguishably connected. He wrote poems of resistance in French which engaged his Catholic spirituality as well as his Senegalese heritage. Senghor is the author of several collections of poetry which includes *Chants d’ombre* (1945), *Nocturnes* (1961), and *The Collected Poetry* (1991, translated by Melvin Dixon). He also edited an anthology of work by African poets in French colonies in 1945, with an introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre. His nonfiction work includes numerous volumes on politics, sociology, philosophy and linguistics.

Senghor co-founded, with Aim Cesaire, the Negritude movement, which promotes distinctly African cultural values and aesthetics, in opposition to the influence of French colonialism and European exploitation. He also co-founded the journal *Presence Africaine* with Alione Diop. Senghor, the first African invited to join the Academie Francaise, was awarded honorary doctorates from 37 universities apart from other literary acknowledgements he received for his contributions. Senghor died at his home in France at the age of 95.

He is regarded by many as one of the most important African intellectuals of the 20th century.
TO NEW YORK

(Poem)

New York! At first I was bewildered by your beauty,
Those huge, long-legged, golden girls.
So shy, at first, before your blue metallic eyes and icy smile,
So shy. And full of despair at the end of skyscraper streets
Raising my owl eyes at the eclipse of the sun.
Your light is sulphurous against the pale towers
Whose heads strike lightning into the sky,
Skyscrapers defying storms with their steel shoulders
And weathered skin of stone.
But two weeks on the naked sidewalks of Manhattan—
At the end of the third week the fever
Overtakes you with a jaguar’s leap
Two weeks without well water or pasture all birds of the air
Fall suddenly dead under the high, sooty terraces.
No laugh from a growing child, his hand in my cool hand.
No mother’s breast, but nylon legs. Legs and breasts
Without smell or sweat. No tender word, and no lips,
Only artificial hearts paid for in cold cash
And not one book offering wisdom.
The painter’s palette yields only coral crystals.
Sleepless nights, O nights of Manhattan!
Stirring with delusions while car horns blare the empty hours
And murky streams carry away hygenic loving
Like rivers overflowing with the corpses of babies.

II

Now is the time of signs and reckoning, New York!
Now is the time of manna and hyssop.
You have only to listen to God’s trombones, to your heart
Beating to the rhythm of blood, your blood.
I saw Harlem teeming with sounds and ritual colors
And outrageous smells—
At teatime in the home of the drugstore-deliveryman
I saw the festival of Night begin at the retreat of day.
And I proclaim Night more truthful than the day.
It is the pure hour when God brings forth
Life immemorial in the streets,
All the amphibious elements shining like suns.
Harlem, Harlem! Now I’ve seen Harlem, Harlem!
A green breeze of corn rising from the pavements
Plowed by the Dan dancers’ bare feet,
Hips rippling like silk and spearhead breasts,
Ballets of water lilies and fabulous masks
And mangoes of love rolling from the low houses
To the feet of police horses.
And along sidewalks I saw streams of white rum
And streams of black milk in the blue haze of cigars.
And at night I saw cotton flowers snow down
From the sky and the angels’ wings and sorcerers’ plumes.
Listen, New York! O listen to your bass male voice,
Your vibrant oboe voice, the muted anguish of your tears
Falling in great clots of blood,
Listen to the distant beating of your nocturnal heart,
The tom-tom’s rhythm and blood, tom-tom blood and tom-tom.

III
New York! I say New York, let black blood flow into your blood.
Let it wash the rust from your steel joints, like an oil of life
Let it give your bridges the curve of hips and supple vines.
Now the ancient age returns, unity is restored,
The reconciliation of the Lion and Bull and Tree
Idea links to action, the ear to the heart, sign to meaning.
See your rivers stirring with musk alligators
And sea cows with mirage eyes. No need to invent the Sirens.
Just open your eyes to the April rainbow
And your eyes, especially your ears, to God
Who in one burst of saxophone laughter
Created heaven and earth in six days,
And on the seventh slept a deep Negro sleep.

EXPLANATION

New York is the commercial as well as capital of America. Therefore, it stands as an symbol of financial stability and exponential growth. The poet Leopold Senghor exclaims that he was captivated at the beauty of New York but it was restricted to physicality of the “great long-legged golden girls.” The poet seems to be wary at the first sight of the City of Skyscrapers. Initially it was because of his inferiority complex as the city was beyond his imagination. Secondly, as he could not confront the “blue metallic eyes”.

The adjective “metallic” has numerous implications in this context. The term could mean the lifelessness of the eyes. It may also indicate the nerve of steel. Furthermore, it points to the frigidity of the eyes. The phrase “frosty smile” is a simile that refers to a consumer society. The poet refers to the height of the skyscrapers as well. The line “lifting up owl eyes in the sun’s eclipse” reveals the way in which warmth of life is denied. Also, the adjective “sulphurous” indicates pollution which is visible in every busy and over populated city.

The skyscrapers seem to defy ‘cyclones’ as if challenging the very notion of God. The stone of the skyscrapers has been demolished against the climatic conditions. The sidewalks of Manhattan seem bald as compared to the grassy areas of nature. There are wells and pastures. All the birds seem to limit themselves to terraces. Nothing can be considered as innocent in this showy sophistication, pseudo-modern existence. No child’s laughter is to be heard, no mother suckling her baby. Only “legs in nylon” and “breasts with no sweat and smell.” In a consumer society, mouths are lipless due to lack of genuine expression and communication. What eventually matters is profit and gain.

No books are to be found that impart wisdom and even people are reluctant to part with it. The poet even criticizes European art as the painter’s palette is filled with crystals of coral. The nights in Manhattan are characterized by insomnia. People surrender to their impulsive needs. The term ‘hygienic loves’ refer to contraceptives, as they floated in the dark waters and the holiness of love is considered as dirt.

The poet warns the superficial world to pay attention to the heeding of God “signs and reckonings.” Senghor states that it was high time for heavenly purity to descend on earth. The poet implores with them
to listen to the heart beat and thus makes a distinction between the self and the conscious. The poet sees Harlem humming with sounds, solemn color and flamboyant smells. The three sensory insights are subject to artificial inspirations. This is the only break to the man delivering pharmaceutical products. The pseudo-artificial products come into focus. The night holds more truth as compared to the day. The true colour of all things come to the front. It is the purest form that sets life sprouting before memory.

Harlem is a neighborhood in the New York City borough of Manhattan. Since the 1920’s, it has been a major African-American residential, cultural, and business center. The term “Harlem” refers to the Unification of African-American life. Therefore, the “corn springing from the pavements” represent the marriage of Africa and America, of nature and sophistication. It stands for the assimilation of the “white rum” and “black milk”. The masks decorated are “fabulous masks” as one cannot distinguish the African from the American.

“Listen to the far beating of your nocturnal heart, rhythm

And blood of the drum, drum and blood and drum.”

This drum stands for the spiritual rhythm of African traditional life as echoed in Gabriel Okara’s “Mystic Drum”. The interchange of the words “drum” and “blood” reflect a pulse-like rhythm that highlights the same.

Senghor claims that unity is to be discovered in the reconciliation of the Lion, the Bull and the Tree. The wild, the domestic and the vegetative world. Eventually, he comes to understand that there is no significant meaning to this sort of life and the end becomes the means. The meaning of the journey no longer holds significance in a fast-forward life. In fact, they do not possess a heritage at all. Therefore, there is no need “to invent the mermaids”. America is always questioned regarding a history of its own, its roots and tradition.

Senghor declares that there is no need to indulge in a culture of myth that they do not possess in the first place. The life prevalent there is based on the formula of success, in an era of competition. Life has lost its true purpose and tarnished in the ‘steel articulations”. The steel articulations refer to the Industrial Revolution. Besides, it may also allude to the steel nerve of the colonizers. It connotes their rigid stance and policies. The poet wants the black blood to act as a lubricant and life-force in such a situation.

Blood is red in colour, and is therefore universal. Here the poet considers this blood exceptional by attributing it with the adjective “black”. But again, it acts as the “oil of life” or sustains life that is a universal phenomenon.
The title “To New York”

Beauty of New York: Blue eye, Golden Girl. The poet Leopold Sedar Senghor exclaims that at first the beauty of New York held him in wonder as it was superficial and artificial. It was limited to physicality of the “great long-legged golden girls.” The adjective “metallic” has various connotations here. The term may refer to the lifelessness of the eyes. It may also allude to the nerve of steel.

“Now is the time of manna and hyssop.” Manna symbolizes the happiness of heaven. Hyssop that the blood of a bird offered in sacrifice is to be scattered for the cleansing of a man or a house affected with leprosy. The three sensory perceptions are subject to artificial stimulations. This is the only interval to the man delivering pharmaceutical products.

Major themes discussed in the poem are artificiality, cultural heritage, life without interest and so on.

The third stanza picks up the tempo, and Senghor is earnestly imploring New York to “let black blood flow into your blood.” Senghor seeks to make New York aware of just how much of Africa’s culture is held within it. He encourages the people to “Let it give your bridges the curve of hips and supplvines. Idea links to action, the ear to the heart, sign to meaning. Means claims that unity is to be discovered in the reconciliation of the Lion, the Bull and the Tree. The meaning of the journey no longer holds significance in a fast-forward life. In fact, they do not have possess a heritage at all; therefore, there is no need “to invent the mermaids”. Negritude into a people who were probably very closed off, and rallies his Negro brethren to take pride in their heritage. Do not have equal position Lets black blood flow on New York.

Further Reading:

GABRIEL OKARA (1921-2019)
Cultural conflict is one of the most striking themes in African poetry. African poet Gabriel Okara focuses the ice-cold attitude of Europeans to the African culture and their representation rather in a humiliated way. Gabriel Okara was born in Bomoundi in Bayelsa state, Nigeria in 1921. He is a Nigerian poet and novelist, and has infused his poetry with images of his Nigerian delta birthplace and his writing links the concept of his native language Ijaw with the English vocabulary. He was awarded Commonwealth Poetry Award in 1979.

His famous poems are “Piano and Drums”, “You laughed and laughed and laughed”, Once upon a time” and so on. He was often worried about the attack of Western culture over the African ancient culture. The same theme is visible in his novel The Voice. Unfortunately, many of his manuscripts have been destroyed in the civil war.

During his life, Okara did odd jobs such as a book binder, journalist, radio broadcaster and newspaper editor. He has also travelled to the USA where he helped raise money for Nigeria giving poetry recitals. Okara’s poems tend to reflect the problems that African nations face as they are torn between the culture of their European colonialists and their traditional African heritage. He also looks at the traumatic effect that colonization and de-colonization can have on the self and on one’s sense of personal identity.

THE MYSTIC DRUM
(Poem)

The mystic drum in my inside
and fishes danced in the rivers
and men and women danced on land
to the rhythm of my drum

But standing behind a tree
with leaves around her waist
she only smiled with a shake of her head.
Still my drum continued to beat,
ripping the air with quickened
tempo compelling the quick
and the dead to dance and sing
with their shadows -

But standing behind a tree
with leaves around her waist
she only smiled with a shake of her head.

Then the drum beat with the rhythm
of the things of the ground
and invoked the eye of the sky
the sun and the moon and the river gods -
and the trees bean to dance,
the fishes turned men
and men turned fishes
and things stopped to grow -

But standing behind a tree
with leaves around her waist
she only smiled with a shake of her head.

And then the mystic drum
in my inside stopped to beat -
and men became men,
fishes became fishes
and trees, the sun and the moon
found their places, and the dead
went to the ground and things began to grow.
And behind the tree she stood
with roots sprouting from her
feet and leaves growing on her head
and smoke issuing from her nose
and her lips parted in her smile
turned cavity belching darkness.

Then, then I packed my mystic drum
and turned away; never to beat so loud any more.

EXPLANATION

“The Mystic Drum” is an African poem both in content and form. Being an African, Okara goes back to his roots in history, religion and culture and folklore. Through its image and symbol, rhythm and tone, the poem expresses the subtle nuances of an African experience. In a way this poem justifies the modernist dictum, ‘A poem should not mean, but be’. In African folklore, the beating of drums has ritualistic and therefore mystical significance. The beating of the drum unites the mind and heart of the drum beater with the outer world of nature. But the idea of cosmic unity in the poem does not last long. There is an end to this beating of the drum. The poem’s thematic emphasis is not upon how man and nature became one when the mystic drum beats within him; but it is about the brevity of this experience. The return to the reality makes the poet sing: ‘never to beat so loud any more’.

Here there is the dialectic between tradition and influences. There are no noticeable references to the neo-colonialism or cultural imperialism, and unlike Ngugi, Okara does not relate the problem of culture to the economic sphere.

When we are talking about The Mystic Drum, it is essential to tell that it is a love poem. The lady referred to in the poem may stand as a symbol that represents the lure of Western life and how it appeared to be interesting at first but later became unpleasant to the poet.

The ‘drum’ in African poetry generally stands for the spiritual pulse of traditional African life. The poet asserts that first, as the drum beat inside him, fishes danced in the rivers and men and women danced on the land to the rhythm of the drum. But standing behind the tree, there stood an outsider who smiled with an air of indifference at the richness of their culture. However, the drum still continued to beat rippling the air with quickened tempo compelling the dead to dance and sing with their shadows. The ancestral
glory overpowers other considerations. So powerful is the mystic drum, that it brings back even the dead alive. The rhythm of the drum is the aching for an ideal Nigerian State of harmony.

The outsider still continued to smile at the culture from the distance. The outsider stands for Western Imperialism that has looked down upon anything Eastern, non-Western, alien and therefore, ‘incomprehensible for their own good’ as ‘The Other’. The African culture is so much in tune with nature that the mystic drum invokes the sun, the moon, the river gods and the trees began to dance.

The gap finally gets bridged between humanity and nature, the animal world and human world, the hydrosphere and lithosphere that fishes turned men, and men became fishes. But later as the mystic drum stopped beating, men became men, and fishes became fishes. Life now became dry, logical and mechanical thanks to Western Scientific Imperialism and everything found its place. Leaves started sprouting on the woman; she started to flourish on the land. Gradually her roots struck the ground. Spreading a kind of parched rationalism, smoke issued from her lips and her lips parted in smile. The term ’smoke’ is also suggestive of the pollution caused by industrialization, and also the clouding of morals. Ultimately, the speaker was left in ‘belching darkness’, completely cut off from the heart of his culture, and he packed off the mystic drum not to beat loudly anymore. The ‘belching darkness” alludes to the futility and hollowness of the imposed existence.

The outsider, at first, only has an objective role standing behind a tree. Eventually, she intrudes and tries to weave their spiritual life. The ‘leaves around her waist’ are very much suggestive of Eve who adorned the same after losing her innocence. Leaves stop growing on the trees but only sprout on her head signifying ‘deforestation.” The refrain reminds us again and again, that this Eve turns out to be the eve of Nigerian damnation.

**STRUCTURE OF THE POEM**

The poem has three different parts - an initial phase of conventional knowledge when men are men and fishes are fishes (line 1-15); a middle phase of more intimate knowledge when men are no longer fishes (lines 16-26) and a final phase of ‘substantial knowledge’ when men are once again men and fishes are once again fishes, with the difference that at this phase, the beloved lady of the lyric is depicted as ‘standing behind a trace’ with “her lips parted in her smile”. It is more particularly a philosophical poem in which the dynamics directions and management of ‘the mystic drum’ of passion that beats in the poet’s inside are dramatically re-enacted.

At the initial level of conventional knowledge (lines 1-7), the speaker sees people as people and fishes as fishes. At this level, the love relationship between the lover and his beloved is still at a primary
phenomenal and mundane level of innocent physical and sexual attraction. As at the end of the first and second phases, the beloved is no longer simply ‘standing behind a tree/with leaves around her waist’, only smiling “with a shake of her head”. She is no longer silent but active, combustive, mysterious and even ominous. At this climax of his emotional and epistemological initiation, the lover finally decides to ‘pack’ his ‘mystic drum’ turning away from an over-excited involvement in love relationships, determined ‘never to beat so loud anymore’.

The mystic drum and the transformations are projected to the personality of the beloved who acquires extra-ordinary powers that effectively transform her into a supernatural being, indeed a goddess, invested with the powers “of the things of the ground” (earth) of the “the eye of the sky/the sun and moon” (heaven) and of the ‘river gods’ (water).

TO SUM UP

The Mystic Drum is Okara’s love lyric. The poem demonstrates a many-sided ritual pattern of imitation from innocence through intimacy to experience. In the poem we saw that men, women and fishes are dancing on the beat of drum and it shows the connection of nature and humans, that they are dancing together. The African culture is connected with nature, the mystic drum invokes the sun, the moon, the river, gods and the trees began to dance. Besides, the lady in the poem is outsider and the colonizer as well. And also from the persona of the poem we understand that industrialization had changed the face of Africa. Their culture is destroyed by the westerners who started ruling over Africa. It could be understood that the lady is the personification of industrialization. Industrialization started sucking the land through theirs roots. The smoke coming from her lips suggests the spread of pollution due to industrialization. To conclude, in the poem we found that when the drum is beaten men becomes fishes and fishes become men. But when mystic drum stopped beating men become men and fishes become fishes. It shows that life become dry and mechanical.

Further Reading:

- [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=africana_faculty_pub](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=africana_faculty_pub)
David Diop (1927 - 1960)

David Diop was born to a Senegalese father and Cameroonian mother in the city of Bordeaux, France, in 1927. He started writing poetry while he was still at school. He was one of the contributors to Leopold Senghor's anthology of poems published in French. This was a major milestone in the history of black French literature as it put forth the movement of 'Negritude' by asserting the greatness of black people contrary to the white man's dismissal of them as primitive and uncivilized. Diop's poetry talks about the glorious past of Africa and also recollects the untold sufferings and humilities underwent by the Africans in the last few hundred years. Diop suffered from poor health for the most part of his life and died at a very early age of 33 in an air crash off Dakar, Senegal, in 1960. His poetry will always be remembered as one of the milestones in the reservoir of African literature.

AFRICA

(Poem)

Africa my Africa
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs
Africa of whom my grandmother sings
On the banks of the distant river
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
Africa, tell me Africa
Is this your back that is unbent
This back that never breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars
And saying no to the whip under the midday sun
But a grave voice answers me
Impetuous child that tree, young and strong
That tree over there
Splendidly alone amidst white and faded flowers
That is your Africa springing up anew
springing up patiently, obstinately
Whose fruit bit by bit acquires
The bitter taste of liberty.
Africa my Africa

EXPLANATION
The poem begins by Diop recollecting about Africa, a land he has not seen but only heard about from his grandmother's songs. His choice of words like "distant" symbolize how far he is from his country, a feeling based on his real life as he lived in France throughout his childhood and only visited Africa in the 1950s. Despite this, he paints a vivid scene of Africa and the proud warriors who walk on its "ancestral savannahs". You can sense how much he misses his homeland by his stress on the word Africa, and he continues to call it "My Africa" to stress it is his land and his feelings of patriotism towards it.

“I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery”

He continues to say that he has never known Africa, but despite the distance he cannot disagree with how much it is a part of him. The "beautiful black blood" which flows in his veins describes his African descent and shows how much Africa is a part of him and his love for it and its people. The next stanzas are angry and accusatory as he stresses that it is the blood and sweat of his people which is irrigating the fields for the benefit of other people. By this he is pointing a finger at the colonialists who exploited Black people and used them as slaves to extract profits from their hard labour.

“Africa, tell me Africa
Is this your back that is unbent?
This back that never breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars
And saying no to the whip under the midday sun”
In these stanzas he urges the Black people to stand up to the pain and the humiliation that they are suffering in their own land. He reminds them of the strength and pride they have in them and to say no to the whip of the colonialist which makes them work under the hot midday sun and leaves scars on their backs. Despite this suffering he urges them to be strong and remain unbent and not let this break them despite the weight of their suffering.

But a grave voice answers me
Impetuous child that tree, young and strong
That tree over there
Splendidly alone amidst white and faded flowers
That is your Africa springing up anew
Springing up patiently, obstinately
Whose fruit bit by bit acquires
The bitter taste of liberty.

In these verses the wise voice of Africa chides him for thinking "impetuous" thoughts, and implies to us that a continent lies in wait for something to happen. It urges the Africans to be patient and not to be hasty like children as there is change on the horizon. The tree "young and strong" represents the young people of Africa who are patiently but "obstinately" waiting until they get the liberty they want. At the moment the tree is alone, meaning the African struggle is a lonely battle but they will achieve the freedom and liberty they want no matter how bitter the taste. By the "white and faded" flowers he means the colonialists who will fade in time; the youthful Africans will grow in strength and wait for their moment of freedom.

TO SUM UP
David Diop's "Africa" celebrates the typical love of the African for their motherland and the ancestors. The Africa, the poet speaks of deals with proud warriors in Ancestral Savannahs; the Africa of whom his grandmother sings. It is not only with the present but also with the past. Thus, the love is not something infected but transmitted in the blood and can never be evaporated till death. The greatest irony is that though he has never seen his ancestors, their blood flows in his veins and thereby he can feel their love for his country and their adoration of tradition. It is their black blood that irrigates the fields. The poet attacks the world's theory that Africa does not possess a history. It is a kind of history that the colonizers refuse to acknowledge. It involves the blood of their sweat, the sweat of their work and the work of their
slavery. It is not any slavery, but the slavery of the children of Africa. And thus, Africa's back is bent in misery and humiliation preferring to break than bend. The back trembling with scars has its wounds afresh and raw. Never did the sentiments of the natives submit so indifferently to oppression of the colonizers. They are still pained by the experiences and continue to be so. However, a ray of hope appears in the form of a grave voice. It may symbolize the ancestors or some African god. It ascertains to the impetuous son that the tree still stands there young and strong and is capable of spreading its branches and reaching out to new horizons.

The poem "Africa" reflects the poet's vision of an independent and sovereign Africa. Diop was strongly critical of Europe. The glorious, pre-colonial Africa is no longer the present Africa. The lingering memories of loss, slavery, humiliation makes the present freedom taste bitter. Postcolonial Africa is an Africa of a different kind. Colonialism may end but the bitter memories linger forever.

This is a poem in which Diop by the power of his imagination calls forth three stages in the continent of Africa's history: pre-colonial days of proud warrior tribes, the colonial experience of subjugation and humiliation, and the postcolonial freedom and sovereignty. The first seven lines present an essentially idealized image of Africa with which the speaker identifies then follows a realistic picture of Africa's experience of bitterness, despair and mockery under colonial rule. The last eight lines present a future of hope built on some of the realistic elements of colonial experience: Africa as a young tree patiently springing up and gradually acquiring "the bitter taste of liberty".

In David Diop’s poem, "Africa", the poet hopes to create a renewed Africa out of the bitter experiences of colonialism. The poem is postcolonial as it gives the understanding that the effects of colonialism will continue to haunt even after the disappearance of colonialism. The poet's preoccupation with the past glories is also suggestive of its postcolonial nature.

Further Reading:
Allen Curnow was born in Timaru, 1911. His father was a fourth generation New Zealander and his mother was English born. Besides, his father was an Anglican clergyman and he lived in a variety of Anglican rectories around the far south of the South Island. Curnow studied at both Canterbury and Auckland universities and worked for various newspapers during this period. In between he prepared for the Anglican ministry however, decided not to be ordained in the early 1930s. His religious upbringing and personal religious crisis were an important influence in his writing. Later, he returned to the South Island in 1934 and went back to working for newspapers. Meanwhile, he became good friends with Denis Glover. During the war years, his writing became influenced by history and the idea of national identity. It can be seen that after the war he moved to more personal and universal themes. Finally, he died in 2001 at the age of 90.

HOUSE AND LAND (1941)

(Poem)

Wasn’t this the site, asked the historian,
Of the original homestead?
Couldn’t tell you, said the cowman;
I just live here, he said,
Working for old Miss Wilson
Since the old man’s been dead.

Moping under the blue gums
The dog trailed his chain
From the privy as far as the fowl house
And back to the privy again,
Feeling the stagnant afternoon
Quicken with the smell of rain.
There sat old Miss Wilson,  
With her pictures on the wall,  
The baronet uncle, mother’s side,  
And one she called The Hall;  
Taking tea from a silver pot  
For fear the house might fall.

People in the *colonies*, she said,  
Can’t quite understand…  
Why, from Waiau to the mountains  
It was all father’s land.

She’s all of eighty said the cowman,  
Down at the milking-shed.  
I’m leaving here next winter.  
Too bloody quiet, he said.

The spirit of exile, wrote the historian,  
Is strong in the people still.

He reminds me rather, said Miss Wilson,  
Of Harriet’s youngest, Will.

The cowman, home from the shed, went drinking  
With the rabbiter home from the hill.  
The sensitive nor’west afternoon  
Collapsed, and the rain came;  
The dog crept into his barrel  
Looking lost and lame.  
But you can’t attribute to either
Awareness of what great gloom
Stands in a land of settlers
With never a soul at home.

EXPLANATION

The poem reveals three main characters – a historian, cowman, and Mrs. Old Wilson. Apart from them the poem brings forth another character an old dog as well. Stanza one depicts that a historian is visiting a farm, presumably because it is an old farm from the colonial period. He speaks to the ‘cowman’ who says he has worked for Miss Wilson since her husband died.

The second stanza describes a dog that lives on the farm. The dog is chained up and spends its days ‘moping’ between the privy (toilet) and fowl house (chicken coop.) He is trapped there, going back and forth between his ‘two worlds.’

The third stanza portrays Miss Wilson in her home. The pictures that surround her represent the British heritage – the world her family has come from. She suggests her uncle was a baronet – one of the highest ranks in England’s aristocracy, yet Miss Wilson is a colonial, which was considered to be one of the lowest ranks. These are her true pictures of ‘home’ and show that even though she has lived in New Zealand for 80 odd years, she still does not see it as a home.

In the fourth stanza Miss Wilson comments on how the “people in the colonies” (Maori) do not understand the concept of land ownership. (Before the Treaty/ colonisation people did not individually “own” their own land, so it was a foreign concept to them.) She implies they are less intelligent with her words. It also shows how much land the settlers received on their arrival, a land that was often simply ‘taken’.

The fifth stanza returns to the milk shed, and we can see the historian is still talking to the cowman. He says he is leaving next winter as it is too quiet which means not much of a life for him. In the sixth stanza the historian analyses the “evidence” of the place and his conclusion is that the people, that is. the settlers still long for the ‘home’ they have left.

The seventh stanza shows that the cowman and the rabbiter (the only one who is at “home”), are done with their days work, and is going off for a drink. The image of the “nor’west” afternoon shows the characters are clearly not in England because the wind in England is generally North-Easters or South-Westers, depending on the time of year. The symbolism of the confined dog is reinforced as it now looks “lost and lame,” again a fair description of the old woman. It shows the same reluctance towards its
home, a barrel, that Miss Wilson does to hers. The great gloom referred to on line 38 is an intensification of the depressed moody imagery established in the second stanza, which creates the atmosphere that these settlers, who feel like ‘exiles’, experience. The last line, “with never a soul at home” emphasizes the sense of displacement they experience.

TO SUM UP

From the poem it is very clear that Miss Wilson is hopelessly obsessed with her past, and the future appears to hold no hope. The cowherd says that he is leaving the house due to the prevailing silent atmosphere. The house lacks happiness and merriment. It is haunted by utter hopelessness, as symbolized by the dog brooding in contemplation and innate stagnation is visible as it is caught between the two worlds. The cowman leaves for the hill with rabbiter. Though it rains, it does not bring happiness. Here rain stands as a symbol of hope and redemption. The dog retires to its barrel, where it remains lost and lame. ‘lame’ and ‘lost’ are two postcolonial words. The word ‘lame’ suggests the handicap of the settlers as they missed their homeland. The settlers always felt themselves to be incomplete, though settlers never settled down.

In short, we can see sentiments of alienation and cultural transformation even in their language. Philosophy of life is displaced. Their indigenous culture is polluted with cultural imperialism. The tone of the poem is rather depressed.

Further Reading:

AUSTRALIA

A.D HOPE

INTRODUCTION

Australia emerged as a country which contained a number of colonies at the early phase of Western domination. The first generation of Australian writers came from these places where people from various European countries arrived and settled for generations. The first flowering of Australian literature unfolded through the works of these Australian writers of European descent. As the European influence is prominent in the first literary works, the early Australian literature often shared the English literary traditions. Poetry occupies a significant portion of the early Australian literature. Gradually Australian literature has grown to be more Australian in tone and theme. The writers of European descent have imbibed the Australian culture in their works and Australia emerges anew through their works. Australian poetry by the writers of European descent followed the same trend.

Early Australian Poetry by the Writers of European Descent

The early Australian writers of European descent share their awareness of belonging to a settler community. Their writing represents a celebration of pioneering Australian values and a deep attachment to the land, its nature and people. The early Australian poets of European descent like Charles Thompson and William Wentworth tried to capture their experience in the new land and their sense of local pride as they were born in the colony in their work ‘Australasia’ (1823). The first volume of Australian poetry by the writers of European descent is Barron Field’s First Fruit of Australian Poetry (1819) which was published in Australia. The writers in the colony often expressed their nostalgia for ‘home’, their ancestral roots in European countries. A sense of exile haunted the poems of the convict songs and the Bush ballads of that time.

Nationalistic feelings were in the rise in the Australian poetry of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century and the pioneering Australian journals like Bulletin promoted Australian literature for the Australian people. Australian poets of European descent also began to ‘write Australian’ and Henry Lawson emerged as the poet of the people. Another important contributor in the Bulletin was A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson who was hailed for his Bush ballads. These two classical Australian poets, Lawson and Banjo Paterson were entangled in the well-known ‘Bulletin debate’. This debate presented these two poets’ perspectives on the Australian nature of life. Lawson wrote about the hard realistic life of the Bush while the Romantic Bush life comes alive in Paterson’s poetry. Other important Australian poets of European descent are Henry Kendall, Christopher Brennan and Adam Lindsey Gordon.
Modern Australian Poetry

Modern Australian poetry begins not in the superficial depiction of Australian land and nature, but through a philosophical engagement with the spirit of Australia as rendered in the Australian stories. The nature of modern Australian poetry is varied and quite debated by the writers of European descent. Sometimes it is cosmopolitan in nature; sometimes the nationalist descriptions are dominant. Often it is brief in expression. Amidst its wide variety in tunes and expressions, some thematic strains can well be distinguished. A deep engagement with the Australian landscape and how the poets imagine is something central to the modern Australian poetry. A kind of experimental writing is gaining the center stage. During the early decades of the twentieth century, two poetic movements arose. These movements intended to define the modern Australian poetry, but from two different perspectives. These two movements, the Jindyworobaks and the Angry Penguins began in Adelaide. These two movements played a significant role in shaping the modern Australian poetry. Besides essentially Australian qualities, other national, social and urban issues are delineated in the contemporary Australian poetry in both realist and surrealist manners. Modern Australian poetry by the writers of European descent took many forms- sonnets, free verse, prose-poems and the unique verse-novels. Australian Performance Poetry and the Australian Poetry Slam are other popular poetic schools.

The Jindyworobak Movement

The Jindyworobak movement began in the 1930’s. It was a movement of poets who propagated a unique Australian poetry which would depict the distinctive Australian natural landscape such as the desert and the Bush in Australian terms. These poems would also incorporate the Aboriginal cultural elements and the Aboriginal perception of the Australian nature. Rex Ingamells was the pioneering figure of the poetry movement of the Australian poets of European descent. *Conditional Culture* (1938) was the manifesto of this movement in which Ingamells talked about the specific aims of this movement- “a clear recognition of Australian values, the debunking of much nonsense and an understanding of Australia’s history and traditions: primeval, colonial and modern.” For the Jindyworobaks, the European culture is a conditional culture. They nurtured the literary nationalism further in Australian poetry. *Unabated Spring* (1942), the book of poetry by Ian Mudie, one of the founding members of Jindyworobak movement, imbibed aboriginal Arrente words like ‘Alcheringa’ (spirit of the place) in the poems. Another important Jindyworobak poet was Roland Robinson. *Beyond the Grass-tree Spears: Verse* (1944), *Language of the Sand: Poems* (1949), *Legend and Dreaming* (1952) and *Black-feller, White-feller* (1958) are the major
books of verse of Robinson. The last two books contained components from Aboriginal culture and dream stories.

**Angry Penguins and the Literary Modernism in Australian Poetry**

Another important poetry movement began in Adelaide in 1930s centering on the publication of the literary journal *Angry Penguins*, founded by a group of Adelaide poets like Max Harris, Geoffrey Dutton, Sam Kerr and Paul Pfeiffer. This poetry movement promoted the possibility of experimentation, use of impressionism and surrealism and abstraction in writing poetry. For the leading poets of this journal, the Jindyworobak movement is limited in its scope.

Besides the descriptive verse, the Australian poets of European descent moved to meditative lyrics. A new symbolic understanding of Australia emerges in the modern Australian poetry. Besides the poetic giants, A.D. Hope and Judith Wright, Douglas Stewart, James McAuley, David Campbell, Rosemary Dobson and Vivian Smith enriched this tradition of meditative verse. A.D. Hope’s poetic fabric is textured with the satiric, witty and allusive tunes. His poetry often shows the influence of the middle style of John Dryden, the English neoclassical poet.

We find a more emotionally charged poetic verses in Judith Wright’s poetic composition. Douglas Stewart’s *Collected Poems 1936-1967* (1967) brings in a meditative understanding of natural world in which Stewart conceives a deeper cosmic morality. James McAuley’s fine verses like ‘Pieta’ and poems of *Music Late at Night* (1976) present a different facet of the contemporary Australian poetry.


**A. D. HOPE’S POETRY**

A.D. Hope as an Australian poet of the European descent was quite conscious about the effect of the ancestral English poetry tradition and a simultaneous claim of ‘writing Australian’ on the Australian writers of the European descent. Actually, the Australian literature was primarily written in the language
of the settlers, in English. But the thematic structure is rooted in the soil of Australia. Besides the modern urban landscape of advance technological progress derived from the Western society, the Australian life of the Bush and the desert, the ragged geographical reality of the vast continent resides side by side. This paradoxical understanding of Australian life and nature characterize the poetry of A.D. Hope. He is observant and individualistic in his response to the basic human experience. Allusive and often erotic, his wit is poignant in his poetic expressions. His poetry turns to the conservative side; he is not a man of vernacular Australian.

His poetic structures consist of both dialogic and ironic perspectives. His worldview presents a dialogue between the classical European poetics and the Australian spirit. His understanding of Australia is paradoxical as presented in his famous poem ‘Australia’.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF A. D HOPE (1907-2000)


AUSTRALIA
(Poem)

A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey
In the field uniform of modern wars,
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.
Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: "we live" but "we survive",
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hopeing, if still from the deserts the prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

EXPLANATION
Australia by A. D Hope is a sarcastic and captivating poetry. It contains the value of Australian culture and society and hence it is considered as one of the precious works in Australian literature. The value of Australia that is described in this poem is that of its geographical condition, history and its government.

The first stanza of the poem discusses the geographical condition of Australia which consists of forests filled with trees. The country has high and low lands. The highlands are divided into many ranges and tablelands.
As we all know, Australia is known for its contrasting geographical features, hence it not only has forests but deserts too. The deserts signify how dry Australia is. Here, the poet also compares the Australian deserts to the Arabian deserts as they are very wide and cover eighty percent of the country’s landmass.

Then in the third stanza, the poet explains about many rivers in Australia which flows unpredictably and are high in mineral deposits. It can be seen that these contrasting geographical features have affected the Australian society.

The people in Australia are used to living in warm weather and they pray for snow fall just like the Africans and the Asians do. When we take a look at the history of Australia, it can be found that colonization by the British created negative impact on the Australian native people. “We live” but “we survive” explains their condition.

In the fifth stanza Hope wrote that Europeans were robbers who exploited Australia’s natural resources. The arrival of large number of immigrants to Australia from countries like China, Afghanistan, Japan, etc. caused the native people of Australia to face cross-cultural differences and crisis. Lastly, the word “her” in the poem refers to the head of the country, Queen Elizabeth II during British rule in Australia.

To conclude, one can understand the culture and society of a country not only by actually visiting the country but also by many other ways such as reading the text or literary works. Hence this poem is a representative of Australian geography, history, society, and government during British rule.

The poem is structured in such a way that each stanza consists of four lines with rhyme scheme as abba. The poet uses imagery as a tool to convey the meaning of the poem. Metaphor is used in the poem to depict a reality that Australia have human qualities. The tone of the poem is sarcastic.

**TO SUM UP**

The poem opens with this tone of ironic understatement. The poem criticizes the attitudes, ethics and lifestyle in description of the empty land which lacks cultural identity. The Australian nature is painted with ‘drab green and desolate grey’ and these somber images indicate that Australia is monotonous and dreary place. Besides, the first few stanzas of the poem portray the geographical as well as the intellectual and emotional landscape of contemporary Australia. An Eliotesque urban Australia comes up in the following lines of the poem where a sense of cultural deprivation is predominant. At the end of the poem,
the poet anticipates the coming of the prophet out of ‘lush jungle of modern thought’ to cure the ‘cultured apes’ of their intellectual barrenness.

Further Reading:

- [http://eclass.jnpg.co.in/Admin/WebDoc/pdf/Econtent_Pdf_ADHope'spoemAustralia.pdf](http://eclass.jnpg.co.in/Admin/WebDoc/pdf/Econtent_Pdf_ADHope'spoemAustralia.pdf)
ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

JACK DAVIS

INTRODUCTION - AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL POETRY

It is extremely difficult to strait-jacket the literature produced in the continent of Australia as Australian literature, simply because of the variegated roots to which the inhabitants of the country belong. Historically speaking, the convicts who were transported from the prison houses in England formed the initial settlements in Australia. But to pre-suppose that there was no population before the arrival of these settlers would be huge blunder. The native tribes of Australia, who are known as Aborigines were already settled in many parts of the land. But it is the cultural superiority and hegemony of the white skinned Europeans that denied the native Australians any space in the country’s literary and cultural history.

Before investigating the politics of suppression and erasure, it is worthwhile to take a note of the form of literary activity that was doing the rounds of the Australian outback. To begin with, there was no written literature to show for. The oral songs of the native Australians were passed from generation to generation without ever being put down in printed formats. The focus has been to unearth these songs, not to determine their literary value, but rather their importance in the field of social anthropology. Later came a period when the songs of the convicts and the ballads of the people settled as farmers and cattle owners, known as the bushmen, were incorporated to what is called literature of Australia. As a result of changes, Australian bush poetry was born.

Sea shanties that had rhythm and rhyme, which were mostly composed by illiterate English and Australian sailors, may have influenced the development of bush poetry’s structure. Many free settlers entered into commercial enterprises by meeting the needs of convicts, guards, soldiers and administrative personnel of the colonies, with the supply of food, clothing, timber, horses and bullocks for transport. While oral bush poetry was accessible to the masses, written bush poetry was slowly evolving with stories of people and current events throughout the community, in addition to recording existing bush poetry. While bush poetry was not always accurate in facts, many poems demonstrated the spirit of the people, the general lifestyle and reflected community attitudes. However, the influence of England haunted the literary artists.

The British settlers brought with them the English way of life and values and the literature of Australia started suffering from the anxiety of influence of their English forefathers. Some believed that in the
absence of a literary model, the best thing to do was to follow the British traditions. Others, however, wanted to sever all ties with the ruling nation to forge an identity of their own. But in these controversies, the Aborigines were marginalized and their voices were silenced and the root cause can be traced to pre-discovery European imaginings of Australia as ‘Terra Nullius’, which means empty land. Australia’s cultural and historic past had been effaced and their history re-written which had no mention of the native population. This was done so that the land could be legally claimed by the coloniser’s without any consideration for any earlier claims by Aborigines who lived there before. But thankfully, in modern times Aboriginal poetry has come to the forefront and has slowly started giving voice and identity to the native culture.

The White Settlers in Australia had all but erased the culture and history of the native Australians. Their voices were silenced and led to almost a cultural imperialism of sorts. Indigenous writers have stated giving voice to their suppressed self.

The themes of the earliest Aboriginal writing mainly dealt with public or contemporary events, dealing with topics such as love, marriage, birth and the mythical narration of the beginning of the universe. The historical importance of this tradition is that it talks of a way of life before the invasion of the European settlers. Recent poets have become more critical, more evaluative. In spite of the rich heritage that the Aboriginal people possess, their history becomes available to the English-speaking world from 1960s. There have been some attempts by White Australian writers to represent their voice. However, they were not authentic enough. They were mostly narratives of sympathy rather than narratives of experience. Writings by the Aborigines offer a more reliable depiction of the plights, poverty and injustice. They bring before our eyes the wails of the marginalized sections of society clamouring for freedom and equality.

Australian Aboriginal poetry circles around five major themes: Stolen generation, Assimilation, deprivation of land, Incarceration and Reconciliation. Australian Aboriginal verse has always been censorious of the process of nation formation in Australia. Different issues like land rights, Assimilation, curse of Stolen generation point out the fragments of nation. In the hands of Aboriginal poets, poetry issues out of the miseries of life. Writing becomes a tool for resistance, to conjoin the fissures within the imagined conception of nation. The nefarious curse of the Stolen generation and the resultant problem unleashed a cultural genocide. Many Aboriginal Australian poets through their writings articulated the need to counter the strategy. For example, in ‘Assimilation –No’, Oodgeroo vehemently protests against
this heinous policy. These poets have unmasked the wolfish interest of the Government. The slogans of protection and assimilation acted as a pretext for exploitation, annihilation.

Loss of land is a recurrent theme in Australian Aboriginal poetry. Australian poets have written on this theme extensively. The Aboriginal people are attached to their lands. They consider it as a part of their being. It is not only a place of habitation. It is a part and parcel of their life. Dispossession also erased the cultural practices. Like a viewer watching landscape from outside, the earliest settlers never incorporated themselves with the land.

Australians poets like Oodgeroo, Graeme Dixon, Gordon Hookey articulate the piercing pathos that emanate from dispossession. The original inhabitants of the land began to feel ostracised in their own land. Oodgeroo’s ‘We are Going’ and Hyllus Maris’s ‘Spiritual song of the Aborigine’, for example, deal with this theme.

Another important theme of Aboriginal Australian poetry is ‘Incarceration’. Fragmentation of the self is a corollary of incarceration of young Aboriginals in Australia’s welfare and penal system. Many a poem has been written on the themes of brutal practices in custody. Aboriginal imprisonment was a part of larger process of colonialism. Alf Taylor’s ‘My Mother’ is critical condemnation of the policy of incarceration. The inhumane torture that is meted out to the inmates is laid bare in these poems.

Closely allied to the theme of Incarceration is the theme of ‘Reconciliation’. According to the Aborigines, the result of Assimilation was far from satisfactory. That is why writers have called for ‘Reconciliation’ to walk toward the future without the abandonment of cultural traits. However, all Aboriginal poets do not champion the Reconciliation policy. For them, it is a double-edged sword. A typical poem is ‘In the Spirit of Reconciliation’ by Kerry Reed-Gilbert. In another poem entitled ‘Treaty’, Gilbert advocates sovereignty to put an end to such injustice. In Jack Davies’s poem ‘Integration’ we find the similar plea—“Let these two worlds combine,
Yours and mine.
The door between us is not locked,
Just ajar.”
POETRY OF JACK DAVIES

Jack Davies is another noted name in the field of Australian Aboriginal poetry. He is a poet, short story writer, playwright and activist for the aboriginal people. Born in Perth in 1917, he was the fourth of eleven children to Aboriginal parents who originally came from the North-West of Australia. On his mother’s side, there was a descent from the nineteenth century Afghan community. When Davies was less than a year old, he travelled to the South-West of Western Australia with his family, where his father was appointed foreman of a timber mill at Yarloop.

This ‘bush childhood’, and the period after he left school from age fifteen to seventeen were happy times, as Keith Chesson’s biography demonstrates, and as Davies reveals in poems such as ‘The Children’ and ‘Retrospect’ in ‘The First-born and Other Poems’. After primary school and before his son started working for a living, Bill Davies arranged for the boy to go to the Moore River Native Settlement to learn trade and other skills. Davies recreates scenes from that period in his plays No Sugar (1985) and Kullark (1979).


Davies was a quicksilver personality. Subjected to the pressures of poverty, he worked as a windmill man, a timber worker, a horse breaker, a drover and also as a head stockman. Such diversity of experiences enables him to get a first-hand knowledge about the culture and its problems. His poetry is not elitist.

One of his important themes is companionship. He sets great store by the notion of friendship. Davies felt a sense of camaraderie with the other black stockmen with whom he worked in the North. His poem ‘Aboriginal Stockmen’, in his first book of poems ‘The First-Born’, expresses a sense of mateship with these tough but light-hearted men who kept control of the cattle and kept their dreams to themselves. But many poems deal with the difficult lives of indigenous people and the injustice and suffering wrought upon them by white Australians.
A theme that is often neglected about the poetry of Davies is his faith in Christianity. During the Second World War, Davies returned to the South-West and joined the Brookton Aboriginal Church, taught in the Sunday school there and considered entering the ministry. We need to remember that the Christian outlook of his poetry issues from a practical urge. He does not don the mantle of a preacher. He is guided by humanitarian zeal. Davies wanted to bridge the gap between the White Settlers and the Aborigines. He does not preach the theory of exclusion. His is an unadulterated humanism that refuses to think in terms of binaries. The Aborigines and the Settlers do not belong to two watertight compartments divided by the wall of their hatred for each other. Despite the trials of his life, Davies held no bitterness and was strongly supportive of non- Aboriginal peoples’ involvement in the political and artistic issues of reconciliation. His poem ‘Integration’ is an example of this philosophy.

His description of nature is also praiseworthy. His celebration of nature and natural resources corroborated the rich legacy of Aboriginal society. Poems from the collection ‘Jagardoo’ are conspicuous for their beautiful descriptions of nature. Davies’s legacy to Australian studies in the twenty first century is a close-to –the-earth outlook, a concern for the underdog and reminders in his writing of a humorous and at times theatrical personality.

**ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA**

*(Poem)*

To the Others
You once smiled a friendly smile,
Said we were kin to one another,
Thus with guile for a short while
Became to me a brother.
Then you swamped my way of gladness,
Took my children from my side,
Snapped shut the law book, oh my sadness
At Yirrakalas’ plea denied.
So, I remember Lake George hills,
The thin stick bones of people.
Sudden death, and greed that kills,
That gave you church and steeple.
I cry again for Warrarra men,
Gone from kith and kind,
And I wondered when I would find a pen
To probe your freckled mind.
I mourned again for the Murray tribe,
Gone too without a trace.
I thought of the soldier’s diatribe,
The smile on the governor’s face.
You murdered me with rope, with gun
The massacre of my enclave,
You buried me deep on McLarty’s run
Flung into a common grave.
You propped me up with Christ, red tape,
Tobacco, grog and fears,
Then disease and lordly rape
Through the brutish years.
Now you primly say you’re justified,
And sing of a nation’s glory,
But I think of a people crucified -
The real Australian story.

EXPLANATION

Aboriginal Australia is a poem that focusses on the European influences upon Aboriginal life, as well as the oppression and death that the European population brought with them. Davis uses an openly depressed tone to display the hardship that his ancestors faced dealing with the arrival of the European settlers. This somber tone allows for true emotion to be portrayed through this piece of writing. Davis’ key idea links well to the overall theme as it displays a race’s inability to comprehend the culture of another, resulting in violence and a sense of mutual disrespect that has lasted for over 200 years.

Davis uses multiple historical references, which will be extremely obscure to all but the most knowledgeable historian. He mentions the Yirrakala people, creator of the ‘bark petition’ for Aboriginal land rights, the lake George hills incident, a battle with the Aboriginal people over a fresh water lake,
and McLarty’s run, a reference that plead the audience to find out more about the bloody foundation that modern Australia is built upon, rather than have it forgotten.

Davis also uses the juxtaposition of certain lines to create clear contrast in how the indigenous Australians initially felt about the European settlers to how the settlers treated the Aboriginals. Davis uses the lines “Became to me a brother” and “Took my children from my side” to display the quick change in the European relations of the Aboriginals after they established dominance over Australia, going from relying on the Aboriginals to survive, to choose how they lived their lives. Australia is an amazing country, but we can cover up our bloody past, reconciliation is necessary to keep moving forward.

Davis’ poetry reveals deep attachment to ancestral land. His love for the land is presented in an extensive depiction of images and scenes of Aboriginal landscape. Davis’ poetry is peopled with samples of Aboriginal characters through which he exhibits the devastating impact of the British invasion on Aboriginal people, culture and land.

Further Reading:

MARGARET ATWOOD (1939- PRESENT)

Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a prolific Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist. She has written not only poetry but also literary criticism, book reviews, novels and children’s stories. Atwood’s works have been highly regarded and have an enduring popularity. She has been shortlisted for Booker Prize five times and won it once in 2000 for her novel *The Blind Assassin*. She has also published fifteen books of poetry till date. Many of her poems have been inspired by myths and fairy tales, which have been interests of hers from an early age. Being a novelist, she has written very famous novels such as *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and many more. Her poetry collection is *The Circle Game* (1964), *Expeditions* (1965), *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* (1966), *Power Politics* (1971), *Love Songs of a Terminator* (1983), *Snake Poems* (1983), *You Begin* (1978), *The Door* (2007) and so on.

JOURNEY INTO THE INTERIOR

(Poem)

There are similarities
I notice: that the hills
which the eyes make flat as a wall, welded
together, open as I move
to let me through; become
endless as prairies; that the trees
grow spindly, have their roots
often in swamps; that this is a poor country;
that a cliff is not known
as rough except by hand, and is
therefore inaccessible. Mostly
that travel is not the easy going
from point to point, a dotted
line on a map, location
plotted on a square surface
but that I move surrounded by a tangle
of branches, a net of air and alternate
light and dark, at all times;
that there are no destinations apart from this.

There are differences
of course: the lack of reliable charts;
more important, the distraction of small details:
your shoe among the brambles under the chair
where it shouldn’t be; lucent
white mushrooms and a parting knife
on the kitchen table; a sentence
crossing my path, sodden as a fallen log
I’m sure I passed yesterday
(have I been
walking in circles again?)

but mostly the danger:
many have been here, but only
some have returned safely.

A compass is useless; also
trying to take directions
from the movements of the sun,
which are erratic;
and words here are as pointless
as calling in a vacant wilderness.

Whatever I do I must
keep my head. I know
it is easier for me to lose my way
forever.
INTRODUCTION

Margaret Atwood’s “The Journey to the Interior” is a monologue. This is the apt poetic form for introspection. It is a metaphysical poem with the recurring motif of ‘journey’ which Atwood uses and explores in other works like Surfacing. The ‘interior’ referred to here is the psyche of the poetess. The poetess utilizes an extended metaphor here. The poetess’ inner exploration stretches out to the journeying of the mountain. The use of the words “similarities” in line 1 and “differences” in line 20 show contrast and allows the reader to make connections between the physical world and internal realm, and bridge the gap between connotation and denotation.

EXPLANATION

As one delves deeper into the mind, it stretches out into various directions- incomprehensible and unfathomable. A person with a firm faith can embark on the discovery of the self, and survive intact in the process. For the outsiders, the human mind is as limited as a two-dimensional picture “flat as a wall”. The hills from the distance seem “welded together”. But from near, the opening between them breaks into vast prairies. Furthermore, it does not imply that the interior landscape or mind is uniformly fertile. It has its share of barren swamps that are capable of producing “spindly trees”. The “cliff is not known as rough except by the hand”. The world supposes that only tangible objects exist in this world. The unseen is unfathomable.

The travel is not easy going. It is not statistically correct and mathematically discrete. There are no fixed points to connect, dotted lines as on a map to trace the geography of a point. Or further, even to trace connections. It is beyond geometry too; in that it cannot be “plotted on a square surface”.

“but that I moved surrounded by a tangle of branches, a net of air and alternate light and dark, at all times; that there are no destinations apart from this.”

The poetess moves in the maze of tangled branches. She moves in dark and light hues and colours that define nothing but themselves, just like the self does. Significantly, there are no destinations at the close of such a journey; for the journey itself is the destination. The poetess then lists the differences between the journey to the interior and other typical journeys. This one does not depend on reliable charts as it traverses uncharted territory.
“the distraction of small details:
your shoes among the brambles under the chair
where it shouldn’t be; lucent
white mushrooms and a parting knife
on the kitchen table; a sentence
crossing my path, sodden as a fallen log
I’m sure I passed yesterday”

All the enlisted entities stand for domestic images that are superficial. The poetess signifies that nothing is superficial in the psyche. Nothing is as short-lived as the “lucent white mushrooms”. A sentence crossing his/her path in such an outward existence has no deeper meaning to him/her. It rather poses as an obstacle, “sodden as a fallen log”. And it is familiar as it passed yesterday also. While the truth is that everything produced by the mind is not static with references to distance and time. While the first two stanzas allow us to investigate the features of the mind, the poetess awakens us to a more objective (exterior) view as she suddenly asks us:
(have I been
walking in circles again?)

“A compass is useless; also trying to take directions”
Such ventures are fraught with unseen perils as “only some have returned carefully”. A compass is useless here. Neither visual truths (the erratic movement of the sun) nor the auditory statements (words) are valid here. What is more important is keeping one’s own, without losing oneself.

**THEMES**

“Journey to the interior” is a subtle, multi-layered poem with nuances that may be contrary and therefore, wide open to multiple interpretations. The dream like (surreal) mood is created by meditative (thinking deeply about something, especially when you are sad or worried), reflective musing (a period of thinking carefully about something or telling people your thoughts). The tone, at times, is morbid or melancholic. Written in postmodern style with multiple allusions and dissimilar images, it communicates in later thinking rather than logical sequential processes. The poem is an allegory as it is a narrative which is serving as an extended metaphor.
The inner life is complex and if delved into deeply it can be confronting, demoralizing and depressing, leading to madness, even self-harm. Life can be absurd, meaningless, directionless, even futile. Sensory perceptions and rational thoughts processes are not always reliable to gain true self-insight rather than a holistic emotional and lateral thinking are needed. Language can be inadequate or an obstacle to express the depth of our feelings.

**TECHNIQUE**

Structure: linear, circular, episodic, flash backs, climatic  
Images: visual, auditory, all factory, tactile, gustatory  
Figure of speech: similes, metaphors, personification, analogy, synecdoche, contrast, antithesis, unity, irony, allusions etc.

**LANGUAGE**

As the subject is ruminative, the approach is intensely subjective, private, personal and intimate as indicated by the language, especially first and second person pronouns.  
The possessive, “your shoe” is inclusive and universal seducing us to identify and accept the situation as similar to our own.  
The informal register, colloquial language and lack of proverbs, axioms or rhetoric combine to create a relaxed appealing introspective mood.  
The major repetition the demonstrative adjective, “that” (six times) which not only identifies but distinguishes.

**Further Reading:**

DEREK WALCOTT (1930-)

In the words of William Walsh, “the finest, the most complete of the West Indian poets”. Walcott had a thorough grounding in European history, art and literature. He was a painter before he was a poet. This is in evidence comparing life with art. He often quotes or echoes lines from the English Metaphysical – Eliot, Dylan Thomas and others. He by no means ignores the well – known dilemmas of the West Indian situation. He fuses the outward scene with inward experience and a form of English words resonant with the tradition of literature in English but also appropriate to the particular occasion. Walcott’s poetical works include: Twenty-Five Poems (1948), Epitaph for the Young (1949), In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960 (1962), Selected Poems (1965), The Gulf and the Other Poems (1969), Another Life (1973), Sea Grapes (1976).

Walcott’s main concerns are with isolation, estrangement from society, hunger for human contact, separation from other persons, from other races, from history, from God as in The Castaway, with the poet’s vocation and craft as in The Castaway and the Gulf, with the relationship between the Black people, and the White people, the colonizer and the colonized as in “Ruins of a Great House”.

RUINS OF A GREAT HOUSE
(Poem)

though our longest sun sets at right
declensions and makes but winter
arches, it cannot be long before we
lie down in darkness, and have our
light in ashes…

BROWNE: Urn Burial
Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House,
Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candle dust,
Remain to file the lizard’s dragonish claws;
The months of those gate cherubs streaked with stain.
Axle and coach wheel silted under the muck
Of cattle droppings.

Three crows flap for the trees,
And settles, creaking the eucalyptus boughs.
A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose
The leprosy of Empire.

‘Farewell, green fields’
‘Farewell, ye happy groves!’

Marbles as Greece, like Faulkner’s south in stone,
Deciduous beauty prospered and is gone;
But where the lawn breaks in a rash of trees
A spade below dead leaves will ring the bone
Of some dead animal or human thing
Fallen from evil days, from evil times.

It seems that the original crops were limes
Grown in the silt that clogs the river’s skirt;
The imperious rakes are gone, their bright girls gone,
The river flows, obliterating hurt.
I climbed a wall with the grill ironwork
Of exiled craftsmen, protecting that great house
From guilt, perhaps, but not from the worm’s rent,
Nor from the padded cavalry of the mouse.
And when a wind shook in the times I heard
What Kipling heard; the death of a great empire, the abuse
Of ignorance by Bible and by sword.

A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.
The world’s green age then was a rotting lime

Whose stench became the charnel galleon’s text.
The rot remains with us, the men are gone.
But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind,
That fans the blackening ember of the mind,
My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.

Ablaze with rage, I thought
Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,
And still the coal of my compassion fought:
That Albion too, was once
A colony like ours, ‘Part of the continent, piece of the main’
Nook-shotten, rook o’er blown, deranged
By foaming channels, and the vain expense
Of bitter faction.

All in compassion ends
So differently from what the heart arranged:
‘as well as if a manor of thy friend’s…’

INTRODUCTION
Most of Derek’s poems have the theme of different race, rulers and civilization. His style of writing is reflected in this poem because it revolves around the corrupted or decayed society. The title of the poem “Ruins of a Great House” suggest something is destroyed or decayed and he might be referring to the remains of the plantation house. Also, the great house suggests that the house may have belonged to royals or rich people and it can also be seen as a metaphor for death. The main themes in the poem are corruption, transience, classical civilization and social classes.

Derek Walcott’s “Ruins of a Great House”, is a poem written in his perspective of the Caribbean in the 19th century. During the 1800’s slavery was in the process of being abolished however, before this time
slave conditions in the sugar estates were among the most brutal. Themes that continuously stand out in the poem are Walcott’s expressions about the destruction of the Caribbean using references to death, decaying, and historical figures. Walcott uses graphic imagery, irregular language and rhyme schemes to convey what he feels were serious problems in the Caribbean during this period.

Walcott starts the poem with “Stones of disjecta membra of this Great House/ Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candle dust”. With this he is describing an old house that has been destroyed. Disjecta membra is scattered fragments and the words moth-like would have the reader think of something old. Candle dust is the residue you get from a candle once it has been fully used and you can no longer light it. This is an interesting way to start the poem because Walcott uses this quote to speak about the ruins of this Caribbean Great House so well that you can grasp his concept in the very beginning. We also see this in the second stanza when Walcott uses dead limes and the leprosy of the Empire. With this he is explaining the fall of the British Empire which once stood strong. This is another section of the poem in which he refers to death or decaying and smells of such.

In stanzas of the poem the reader can see Walcott’s frustration and anger with the wrong doings to these African Slaves. He also references some historical writers such as Blake and John Donne. We see this in Stanza 6, “Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake” and in Stanza 3, “Fallen from evil days from evil times”. In these two Stanzas Walcott is showing sympathy for the African slaves and disgust with the historical foundation of the Caribbean. Also, in Stanza 5 from the quotes “Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, and Drake, Ancestral murders and poets, more perplexed”, and “My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne”. In this Stanza Walcott uses a quote from a poem of William Blake, which expresses his frustration with these historical figures. Drake and Hawkins were both early slavers, however all of these men had one thing in common which is the fact that they were all knights and aided the British Empire (Konstom, 1560-1605). With this bold statement the conclusion can be drawn that Walcott clearly knows the history of these men. Lastly at the end of the Stanza he has an interesting way of approaching John Donne by explaining his rage after reading The Ashen Prose.

The imagery that Walcott uses throughout the poem is quite interesting, partly because the language has a unique way of expressing the metaphors. For instance, in the last Stanza he says “But still the coal of my compassion fought”. With this Walcott is saying that the coal was his fuel and his compassion was raging by presenting an image of a strong burning fire that can’t be put out. Also, in Stanza 2 when Walcott says, “Farewell, green fields, Farewell ye happy groves!” we see a turn in the imagery he presents. This quote gives an image of a beautiful field with perfect green grass and healthy trees, which
only appears once in the poem. However, if the reader is educated on the poem “Night” by Blake, as it is about evil rising with the darkness, they will know that this is not such a beautiful image Walcott is trying to portray.

Throughout the poem Walcott uses a unique language, tone and rhythm to convey his message in such a way that many foot notes were provided for this poem. His language structure is not something that the reader would see or even understand the meaning of in an everyday poem. Walcott uses many words that refer to decaying or dead things, “moth-like”, “leprosy”, “exiled craftsmen” “dead ash”. The layout of the poem seems rather dark and disturbing, which is the theme that Walcott is clearly going for. Walcott also does not follow the traditional form of a poem in that he starts two of the Stanzas in the middle, almost like they are titles. He also ends one Stanza in the middle which may suggests significance of the statement. The rhyme scheme is also not your typical ab rhyming format. It almost makes it difficult for the reader to flow from stanza to stanza without pausing to obtain the full message in each one. The reader may see the tone Walcott uses as serious and even a bit angry although there are not many punctuation marks that give these clues. If you understand Walcott’s message along with his background you can predict that he must have been stern when writing this poem.

The poem was appropriately titled “Ruins of a Great House” seeing that the overall theme of the poem was ruins. Walcott uses a plethora of images and references to the rotting of the slave house in the Caribbean and the British Empire. It is evident that Walcott has feelings of fury and resentment towards the history of slavery in the Caribbean in the 1800’s. We get this conclusion from his interesting choice of the layout for the poem, his educated language which suggests the poem is not for your typical reader, and his consistent use of metaphors in reference to deterioration.

**TO SUM UP**

“Ruins of a Great House” focuses on history, colonialism, literature and corruption through power. The poem reflects the period when British colonized great extent of the Caribbean during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, surroundings the lands with plantations where the black slaves were made to work and were subjected to abominable cruelties. It's a poem that reveals Walcott’s ambivalence towards the culture of Great Britain, at its most dominant in the 18th and 19th centuries when slavery was a hugely profitable business.
Three black crows settle in nearby trees symbolizes the dead limes and leprosy emphasize once more the themes of death and decay. The marble of the ruined house reminds the speaker of similarly ruined marble in ancient Greece and in the Old South of the U. S. Trees and other plants once grew in the soil but have now died but some trees still survive, all it takes is probing with a shovel in the leaves in order to find skeletal remains of animals and humans remains from the time when the house was the center of plantation based on the evil system of slavery.

The young men and the young women who were the masters and mistresses of the plantation have long since died, but the river flows now as it did when they lived and it seems almost soothing. The speaker climbed an elaborate iron wall. However, the wall could not prevent the house's decay – decay symbolized by worms and mice.

The poem suggests how Spanish or African people were murdered. There’s again a contrast between now and then. Towards the end of the poem Derek show’s his feelings and attitudes about the whole corrupted society “ember of the mind” images of embers refer to his anger. He mentions how the slaves suffered “rotting in this manorial lak” an allusion to the feudal system; words like these “Ablaze, rage, coal” all refer to his attitudes. Even at the end the comparison is still mentioned “That Albion too, was once” Albion is an ancient name for Britain and England itself was colonized by the Romans. The poem ends on a very affirmative point “All in compassion end it” suggest that in the end compassion is the dominating feeling and it didn’t end how the heart wanted it to or how it was planned.

The poem also explores the inevitable tensions arising between master and slave, perpetrator and victim, history and legacy, writer and conscience.

Walcott uses:

- Metaphor. The metaphorical use of a ruined plantation house as the former empire underpins the narrative.
- Metonym. The lime fruit is a metonym for the British Empire. Lime plantations were particularly profitable and useful because lime fruits helped combat the scourge of scurvy aboard British naval ships.
- Allusion. The English language and culture as expressed by notable writers such as Donne, Blake and Kipling and explorers Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake, is used to create a sense of irony and antipathy.
There is anger and reasoning and finally compassion, an acknowledgement that those slaves who lived and worked here were subject to appalling injustices, yet those who were cruel came from a country that had also once been a colony, of the Romans.

Two dominant themes in Derek Walcott's poem "Ruins of a Great House" are certainly death and decay. Death is first alluded to in the lines of Sir Thomas Browne quoted before Walcott begins his own poem, particularly in the clauses, "[I]t cannot be long before we lie down in darkness, and have our light in ashes"; the lines are quoted from Sir Thomas Browne's book fully titled *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial, or a Brief Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk*. Death and decay are referred to again in the first two lines of Walcott's poem in reference to the "disjecta members," which means in Latin scattered members, of "this Great House" and the "moth-like girls." We even see death and decay being referred to in several images, such as "dead leaves" and "rotting lime."

But the poem itself is about much more than just death and decay. There are several allusions in the poem that make clear references to colonial slavery, and the speaker ends by feeling a unity between what was once the slave master and all of humanity, including the poem's speaker.

It is also important to note that the poem ends with an allusion to John Donne's poem "No Man is An Island," which argues all of mankind's sorrows are connected due to mankind's unity. Hence, all in all, the poem seems to be arguing that, despite the fact that slaves and slaveholders have existed, all mankind is connected in death. Hence, some of the themes in the poem include death, decay, slavery, and unity of man.

**Further Reading:**

- https://commons.marymount.edu/ruinsofagreathouse/close-reading/
- https://www.academia.edu/13953903/A_Sense_of_Place_in_Ruins_of_a_Great_House
E. E TIANG HONG

Ee Tiang Hong (1933–1990) was a Malayan poet of Chinese ancestry. He was born at Malacca during the British colonial period. He was one of the first-generation Malaya poets writing in English. His first book of poetry appeared in 1960.

He was extremely disturbed, troubled, and disillusioned by political developments in the newly independent Malaysia and, in particular, the May 13 Incident had a profound impact on him as is demonstrated in his poetry. Later, he emigrated to Australia with his family and settled down in Perth in 1975. He officially became an Australian citizen in the year 1979. He died of cancer on 27 April 1990 in Perth, Western Australia.

As a poet, his works concentrate on discrimination, dislocation, exile, identity and idea of home signifying his own personal journey and condition. His works remain highly influential in the literary landscape of postcolonial post-independence Malaysia.

Malaysia has a plural, multiethnic background. This nation has been producing literature of caliber for the past few decades, but it is relatively new comer on the literary world map. Compared to India or Africa, Malaysia has not ruled large on the continent. However, in the recent years, Malaysia’s economic boom and political stability has allotted it a position of prominence is the total scenario.

Malayan traditional literature reached the public in the form of stage plays and shadow plays. Contemporary Malayan literature is identified with the author and is presented in the written form.

ARRIVAL

(Poem)

And this is the terminus of truth?
Objectives of the dreams and all
The speculations we saved up
A lifetime and paid for?

And this the welcome await us,
The glossy pamphlet promised
During the Long hours to console
A tedious journey?
This dust on a barren ground?

Are we really arrived, having we
Really reached as the smooth guide says The great and
Beautiful city?
Where the perennials thornless an lovely
Bear only fragrant thoughts and men
Open as flowers, pure as sky?
Dust grits my eye

EXPLANATION

Various political, linguistic and cultural circumstances had rendered and marginalized both as a poet and as a citizen. He was not silenced by the predicament and viewed poetry writing as an act of resistance.

He struggled with the undercurrents of the political and racial policies and soon became a Malaysian poet in exile. His sadness, sense of dejection and displacement soon pervaded his poetry with the remembrance of his homeland and the past.

He published three poetry collections:

1.  *I of the Many Faces* (1960)

These three works represent the poet’s three significant period of social and political experiences.

The poet tries to establish a counter authority through his poetry. His poems are interesting as they are written in English, a language that was marginalized in his homeland.
The poem “Arrival” is included in the collection, *Myths for the Wilderness* (1976) which was written after Malaysia’s independence and before the poet’s migration to Australia. During this period, he had witnessed many social and political changes in the new nation including the infamous riots of the April 1969.

Themes are more heterogenous in the collection and deals with the collective political and social criticism. Of the sixty-one poems in *Myths for the Wilderness*, about half of them are social and political poems. Each poetry collection was written from unique time and space and it means that the poet’s literary outputs are in radically changing social and political contexts.

The changing role of *babas* had a notable influence on the eastern writing. Under the British rule they enjoyed special privilege as British subject. Hence, a more optimistic voice is heard. After independence *babas* suffered deprivation under the Malayan political hegemony and therefore, resentment for *Myths for the Wilderness*. He derives value for mankind.

The poem “Arrival” describes the modernization of the capital city as a form of historical change from a natural landscape to a city scape. Poet’s personal comments on modernization are expressed in the poem. The poem is constructed upon the arrival at the destination of a journey which symbolizes the end of modernization process through the destruction of nature. The poem displaces a set of ironic interrogations against the beautiful city through the destruction of nature.

The poem represents that this is nothing but a wasteland for the poet and demonstrates the hollowness of the poet. The poet makes an evaluation completely different from that made by the public. People doubt about their arrival and is unable to find a solution to the problem. He laments on the loss of nature due to the consequence of the wrong policies and shallow ideas. One can find autobiographical elements and complete Malaya development in this poem. Equal rights are promised as well.

**Further Reading:**

- [http://eprints.um.edu.my/8514/1/All.pdf](http://eprints.um.edu.my/8514/1/All.pdf)
https://www.academia.edu/11769574/Malaysian_Literature_in_English_Challenges_and_Prosp
ects_in_the_New_Millennium
SO WHAT IF I LIVE IN A HOUSE MADE BY IDIOTS?

ALMAGIR HASHMI

ALMAGIR HASHMI (1951- PRESENT)

Aurangzeb Almagir Hashmi is an English poet of Pakistan origin. He is better known as an English poet, but he is a professor of English and comparative literature, an editor of literary and scholarly journals, a scholar-critic, a broadcaster, a translator, musician, and a weekend canoeist. He acknowledges life as a gift.

He won the poetry prize in the All-Pakistan Creative Writing Contest in 1972 and the Patras Bokhari Award (National Literature Prize) of the Pakistan Academy of Letters in 1985, and was the first English language writer to bring such recognition to English writing in Pakistan. He is also widely published abroad — in the United Kingdom, Australia, India, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. He was a judge of the Commonwealth Writers Prize 1990, and a member of the 1996 jury for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

He is a hybridizer of cultures on one level, and on the other level, he is both participant and observer. His poetic persona is complex and multi-faceted. It can be ironic and deeply sincere, it can be Pakistani and American, it can be spiritual and materialist. Love in Hashmi’s poem is never a series of emotional responses removed from their cultural implications. Hashmi is honestly a trans-cultural poet, with varied interests and diverse perceptions.

More than a traveller, he is a world citizen who is living in places as diverse as Switzerland, the USA, and Pakistan. Hashmi writes poems full of shifts between places – slippages, the negotiation of geographical and cultural spatialities that one finds so attractive as a multi-nationed reader.

SO WHAT IF I LIVE IN A HOUSE MADE BY IDIOTS?
(Poem)
So what if I live in a house made by idiots?
In the last one, holes were filled with toothpaste;
was so airtight breathing became a task.
Its bomb- shelters were excellent and made
you feel ready.
This has the walls wet (from tears it causes)
The floors are the best thing in it, get cleaned;
for the monsoon might blow off the roof
yet can you imagine a house without a floor?
The lawn now has a few flowers to its credit.
But the grass keeps debiting. The municipal waters
give it further lease, and the insects introduce you minute
by minute to a part of yourself.
The sun can kiss the face and the back of its neck
at the same time. I call it a place to live.

EXPLANATION

Alamgir Hashmi’s ‘So What if I Live in a House made by Idiots?’ is a representation of the choked cry of marginalized citizens who are destined to live under unsafe roofs where horror dangles like the sword of Damocles.

The title of the poem is a question. The poem describes the situations that necessitated the poet to live in a house made by idiots. The poem is an explanation of the title of the poem. He tells that houses where he lived were made by idiots! The houses were dirty and they did not provide shelter to the inmates. The warmth cozy feelings, comfort, security that one needed were distant dreams in such houses. These houses must have built by some idiots!

The poem deals with one of the horrors haunt the common lot, where houses remain mere houses and they lack what a home has. What the poet tries to pictures is the life in slums either in India or Pakistan. The poem is relevant and time the poem denotes is nothing but the recent time. The poet satirizes the pathetic condition of the houses of marginalized people. Humor is a vehicle of expression employed in the poem. The poet questions the prejudices of the mind set of common folks who shoot secret arrows at about their humble dwellings.

The first house where he stayed was too narrow and it had ‘bomb shelters’ where people lived with much care, so planned that made the inmates ready at any time! Even the tiny holes on the wall were filled with toothpaste which made the room so air tight and even the breathing became a task. Another house where the poet now lives has wet walls and the room became sloughs every three months. The poet says that it is because of the tears- tears of the inmates or the tears of the sky! The floor of the house is always neat and tidy because monsoon blows off the room every year! The grasses in the lawns keep debiting and
weeds blossom in them. To make the condition worse, municipal water pipes leaks, as a result water puddles here and there, which causes for mosquitoes multiply. These mosquitoes prick on the body of inmates every now and then only to make them aware of their different body parts.

The poet employs a few images which evoke the feelings of the marginalized, such as ‘holes of the wall filled with toothpaste’, ‘a house with wet walls and sloughs every three months’, ‘the floors are cleaned for the monsoon might blow off the roof’, municipal water give further lease’, and ‘insects introduce you a part of your body minute by minute’ are suitable and exact images for the context. The poem is written in blank verse and it follows no rhyme scheme. The poem evokes the feelings of the marginalized about their humble dwellings.
Kamau Brathwaite is a Caribbean poet, scholar, historian, a performer, an archivist and an activist. His original name is Lawson Edward Brathwaite. He is also known for his studies of Black Cultural life both in Africa and throughout the African diasporas of the world.

Barbados is the island where Brathwaite was born in 1930, and is the most easterly of the Caribbean island chain and is located some eighty miles out from that chain and English arrived in 1625. The first African slaves were brought to it in 1627. As the island is relatively small and its open terrain allows access to all parts of the country it has been assumed that the slaves were completely engulfed by the dominant European culture and lost all traces of their African past. Another important representative of this island is kumina. Kumina is a ritual ceremony of singing, drumming, dancing and spirit-possession brought over from Africa to the New World by slaves. Its prevalence attests to the continuance and resilience of African culture in Barbados. Racially, the island is one of the most demographically homogeneous territories in the Caribbean with more than ninety percent people of African descent and the rest of European or non-African mixed ancestry.

The evolution of Brathwaite’s poetic career has often been linked to that of his country. At the time when Brathwaite was growing up Barbados was still an English colony. Brathwaite left for England in the 1950s to study History at Pembroke College, Cambridge University. He worked in Ghana for eight years and came back to join as Professor of History at the University of West Indies, Jamaica. Apart from his childhood and adolescent years he has never stayed at Barbados, for an extended period of time and yet the sense of being a “Bajan”, of belonging to Barbados, permeated his work. So, it is only appropriate to view the appearance of his first major volume of poetry, Rights of Passage (1967) a year after the island’s independence and the poetry marking an independence of language as well.

The first volume of his secondary trilogy, Mother Poems, published in 1977 has been called by the poet as being all about “my mother, Barbados”. The landscape of this region- Barbados is a coral island with an underground water supply, filtered through the porous limestone coral rocks.
A recent collection in which the sense of being a part of and yet apart from his native land is thematized is titled Barabajan Poems (1492 – 1992) (1994). Mixing genres, the collection includes poetry, prose, proems (prose poems), the letter, the footnote, autobiography and bibliography. It includes selections of Bajan poetry and hence can also be called an anthology of sorts.

Despite the growing menace of tourism and increasing Westernization, the persistence of Afro-Caribbean culture becomes a cause of celebration in this collection. Linkages are made between Barbados and the African Igbo culture and the language used in Bajan dialect or nation language as Brathwaite would prefer to call it. The critical, cultural, and historical concerns of the author inform his poetry, the African connection and the control of language are issues he has discussed in various essays over the years.

Brathwaite’s poetic career parallels Walcott’s in many respects. Not only are they poets of international repute, both are authors of works which have been called “epics” of Caribbean literature. Brathwaite’s epic is titled The Arrivants: A New Word Trilogy (1973) and comprises his early collections of poetry interlinked by the trope of a journey which is also the governing idea of Walcott’s ‘Omeros’.

The trilogy has been seen as providing an “etiology” of Afro – Caribbean experience through a narrative of an African experience originating on the mother continent and extending to the diaspora. Historical, autobiographical and poetic concerns are interwoven in the work. It presents simultaneously a historical account of the New World civilization and its root in Africa. It is not a literature of despair or recrimination but about the foundation of Caribbean culture in its varied forms be it Rastafarianism, Jazz, Calypo or cult practices like Shango worship. The diaspora experience articulated is that of the author himself who has lived away from Barbados and whose stay in Kenya even resulted in his renaming from Edward to Kamau.

Much has been written about American and Caribbean influences on Brathwaite’s work. Attempts have been made to link his poetry to major American poets like Ezra Pound, T. S Eliot, and Charles Olson. But apart from acknowledging his attraction for Eliot’s “speaking voice”, Brathwaite has denied their work as having had an impact in his creativity. In contrast to this he has acknowledged a Caribbean tradition within which his poetry can be placed. Brathwaite started from local reality to etch the
topographical, linguistic and sociological aspects of the Caribbean. Other Negritude poets like Senghor and Damas were available to Brathwaite through anthologies.

Manifestations of orality and the importance of music in his work can be said to owe something to them. Brathwaite’s efforts in founding and running the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), started by him in London in 1967. He has read poetry with club poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka and Amiri Baraka. Performing his own poetry was in a way a natural corollary to the oral rhythms in Brathwaite’s work. His reading of the “Arrivants’ trilogy was issued as a five-disc set in the 1970’s under the record label Agro.

**Historian**

Brathwaite trained as a historian first at Cambridge where he received his bachelor’s degree and then at Sussex where he submitted his Doctoral thesis entitled “The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820”. This was published by the Oxford University Press in 1971. In this work he calls creolization a “cultural action” or “a social process” based upon the response of individuals within society to their environment and to each other.

Brathwaite criticizes the elite blacks for losing touch with their folk culture and hence losing their chance for independence.

**Cultural Commentator**

Brathwaite’s single most important and most controversial work in Caribbean culture is *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974). It was originally presented as a paper at a conference at John Hopkin’s University. According to him, artists in the West Indies face a “fragmented culture” which has led to a dissociation of sensibility in the early postcolonial literature. Another aspect of Brathwaite’s poetry is the incorporation of oral rhythms. The free verse pattern he uses facilitates this orality since it allows him to experiment with varying line lengths, some even comprised of one word or one syllable.

Using “nation language” as well as linguistic and typographic innovation, Brathwaite composes poems that deftly parse the connected strands of postcolonial, historical, and personal inquiry. As *Publishers Weekly* noted in a review of *Slow Horses* (2005), Brathwaite’s work is “omnivorously synthetic, insistently local, sinuously syncopated and consistently exciting.”

Brathwaite has worked in Ghana’s Ministry of Education, as well as teaching at Harvard University, the University of the West Indies, and New York University. He lived in Barbados and New York City before his death in early 2020. Mia Amor Mottley, the prime minister of Barbados, in the eastern Caribbean, announced his death, calling him “one of the titans of post-colonial literature and the arts.”

Dr. Brathwaite’s many books of poetry included “Born to Slow Horses” (2005), which won the Griffin International Poetry Prize.

**NEGUS**

(Poem)

It
It
It
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not enough to be free of the red white and blue
Of the drag, of the dragon
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not enough to be free of the principalities and powers
Where your kingdom of the Word?

It
It
It
It is not
It
It
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not enough to be free of Malarial fevers, fear of the hurricane, fear of invasions, crops’ drought, fire’s blisters upon the cane
It is not enough to tinkle to work on a bicycle bell
When hell
Crackles and burns in the fourteen – inch screen of the Jap
Of the Jap of the Japanese – constructed
United-Fruit-Company- imported
Hard sell, tell tale tele-
Vision set rhinocerously knobbed, cancerously tubed

It
It
It
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not enough to be able to fly to Miami,
Structured skyscrapers, excavate the moon-scape seashore sands
to build hotels, casinos, sepulchers

It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not enough to be free to bulldoze god’s squatters from their tunes, from their relies from their tombs of drums
It is not enough
To pray to Barclays bankers on the telephone
To Jesus Christ by short wave radio
To the United States marine

It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not
It is not enough
To be pause, to be hole, to be void, to be silent
To be semicolon, to be semicolon;
Fling me the stone
That will confound the void
Find me the rage
And I will raze the colony
Fill me with words
And I will blind your God.

Att
Att
Attibon
Attibon Legba
Attibon Legba
Ouvri bayi pou moi
Ouvri bayi pou moi....

INTRODUCTION
The poem Negus depicts the struggle against the colonial language, literature, and culture. One finds that
the poet is actually shouting in the poem (it it it, it is not, it is not, it is not, it is not enough). The shouting
is a kind of revolt against the influence of colonialism on the minds of Africans. Though the colonial
powers have liberated Africa, yet they rule the thinking of Africans psychologically. Thus, in spite of
being free, the people of Africa are destructed as their culture has been lost due to colonialism.
The poet believes that in order to negate English, they will have to affirm it first. Hence in his works, only words are of English language, else the structure and form are that of Africa. The poem has developing sentences. The words used in the poem are quite easy and commonly spoken which can be understood by every person belonging to ex-communities. The poem Negus, like any other poem of Kamau Brathwaite is meant to be sung and not to be read in order to get the meaning. Hence, the poem forms a part of Orature or Oral Literature which is native to African Culture.

Brathwaite writes such a poem to defend the orature of Africa over the written literature of colonialists. Throughout the poem, we find a plea for bringing back the orature which has been lost due to the introduction of colonial education.

OUTLINE OF THE POEM
The poem is divided into two parts. In the first part, the poet stresses on the fact that just being physically free from colonial powers is not enough as they want psychological freedom as well. In the second part, the poet revolts against the colonialism and demands his language so that he may create a world of his own.

Part 1
The poet says that it is not enough to be physically free from the colonialism (“red white and blue of the drag, of the dragon”) and from the rule of colonial powers (whips, principalities, and powers). He wonders where is the language that was their own. This is a kind of sigh that is made on the loss of their language which was their identity and culture.
He again says that it is not enough to overcome the challenges of the physical life i.e. just recovering from the physical diseases like malaria, or escaping from disasters or overcoming the fear of invasions or droughts or fire is not enough.
It is not enough to go to work by ringing bicycle bell as materialism of Japan (“Japanese-constructed United-Fruit-Company- imported hard sell, tell tale tele-vision set”) and the technical achievements (“structure skyscrapers, excavate the moon-scaped seashore sands to build hotels, casinos, sepulchers”) are immaterial as they take one away from reality virtually.
It is not enough to cut them (Africans) off from their myths, gods, past, history etc. and it is not enough to pray to Christ (God of colonialists) by making a series of knocking sounds on the telephone.
Part 2
The poet moves to first person “I”. he says that he must be given words (his native language) so that he may be able to explain his name to trees i.e. he must be given that language of Africa to be close to nature and far from materialism.

He wants to heal his future from the wounds given by colonialists to their culture and language. He wants words so that he may be able to reclaim his past and bring it into existence which was suppressed by the colonialists.

Through this language, he will create the world, the environment, the heaven, the gods, the oceans and the land. Thus, he wants to recreate the traditional world of the past which was destructed by colonialists. The poet again says that it is not enough to be semi-colony (i.e. physically free but not mentally) nor it is not enough to remain silent. He demands freedom wholly (both physically and mentally). He wants words through which he would blind the God of colonialists and bring his own God instead.

Further Reading:


THE ROAD (1965)

WOLE SOYINKA

WOLE SOYINKA

INTRODUCTION

*The Road* is one of the remarkable plays of Wole Soyinka. It is performed on the stage during 1965 in London. It is written in the phase of sixties. *The Road* won the first prize in commonwealth art festival and proved to be a superb accomplishment of Soyinka as a dramatist. It explores the Socio-political situation of Nigerian based Yoruba Society. It depicts the realistic pictures of the society after the independence of Nigeria. It is considered as a superficially humorous and dramatically intense play.

Each of the characters reflects certain aspects of contemporary society. The single setting continuing for the whole play includes the church and its graveyard; adjacent to it is the road side shack and the lopsided “bolekasa” (a mammy wagon) minus its wheels. Thus, the physical location hints at different dimensions.

The setting takes place in a transport depot of Nigerian town. In a garage, where the salvaged parts of crashed cars are sold, the owner named Professor, an unorthodox Christian, is engaged in trying to understand the meaning of death. According to Pushpa, “It is simply a play about a day in the strange life of a group of drivers in Nigerian road, their aimless existence, waiting for jobs, drinking, sleeping; dreaming of an exciting future is dominated by the obscure but powerful presence of the professor. He runs an establishment providing spare parts for vehicle, which is looted from road accident”. The Road is the product of Nigerian experiences during the middle of the twentieth century and it reflects the different roles played by drugs, criminals, corrupt policemen and unscrupulous politicians.

The play opens with the Conversation between Samson and Salubi. Both are talking on various issues of the Society like parody of the police force, the church and the absurd morality of the wars. Professor, a protagonist of the play, owns a shop called “AKSIDENT STORE”. In a shop Professor selling a part of wrecked cars to drivers who need them. Some other people’s helps professor, they depend on the road for their livelihood. Kotonu, a lorry driver who assists professor in is business. Samson, Kotonu’s companion and tout, is distressed with Kotonu’s indifference to his profession. Salubi, a private chauffeur, managed to obtain a driver’s uniform but has no driving license. Say Tokyo Kid is a typical character, relevant to the universal political scene. He is lorry driver, but is more interested in leading
gang of hooligans. Such gangs help politicians in disrupting meetings of the opponents. Joe is another typical character- a corrupt policeman, fits into the scene smoothly.

Professor himself was a Sunday-school teacher and lay preacher in a church close to his shop. He lost his position in the church after charges of embezzlement of funds and drunken misbehavior were foisted on him, causes Professor lost his faith in the validity of Christian teaching, and retained his interest in spiritual matters. He is obsessed to find the mysterious truth called “the word” and he believes that we cannot understand the meeting of life, unless we understand the meaning of death. This notion prompts him to settle close to the road, as numbers of accidents occur there. He even manipulates certain accidents.

Professor and his worshippers conduct a kind of communication, different from that being administrated in the church. They drink palm-wine served by Murano. Murano is taking part in religious feast in honour of Ogun. He is possessed by god, and runs across the road. He is run over by Kotonu, who is driving the lorry, and could not apply the brakes on time. Professor being happy to keep Murano with him, as he feels that Murano is close to death. He is keen on his doing the ritual dance, so that he could get a revelation of the world. At the end, Say Tokyo Kid makes an attempt to stop the ritual dance, during the fight between both professor and Say Tokyo Kid. Say Tokyo Kid stabs knife to Professor and play comes to an end with the death of professor.

*The Road* is structured around a character called professor and his search for the meaning of a certain “word”. Earlier he was a Sunday school teacher, an austere Christian and after being thrown out of the church for pilfering its funds now he is proprietor of the “Aksedent Store”. In addition to the income from the store, professor plunders from the accident sites, forges driving licenses and, in the evenings, offers shelter, liquor and lecture to the drivers and touts. Professor has nursed and cared for Murano, a god-man, finding him brutally injured in the back of a lorry; he wants to see the divine manifest ting in Murano and hopes he will be helpful in his search providing a sharp contrast to professor is Kotonu, a driver, who before the play has begun, has decided to retire from driving after seeing death in an accident. In the accident Kotonu has killed an Ogun possessed mask-dancer (Murano) who was participating in the driver’s festival of offering sacrifice to the god of road. Frequenting the road side shack of professor is particulars Joe, an unscrupulous policeman hoping to be bribed either by professor or the drivers and touts and chief in town, a corrupt politician looking for the jobless touts for his political criminal activities.
Various characters are the different faces of the corruption in the society. Like, Professor’s embezzlement of church funds, Kotonu’s dishonesty during the driver’s festival, Ogun’s betrayal of his worshipper’s trust, Professor’s manipulation of Murano in the former’s attempt at unraveling the mystery of the “word”, Soyinka executed these aspects appropriately.

Soyinka depicts Yoruba culture and Nigerian society with aspects like traditions, Nature, Songs, and religion. He highlighted various tribal traditions in Yoruba Society. Such as, folk tradition demonstrates spiritual possession. As it is believed in Yoruba Society, Egungun is the cult of the dead, masquerader dances until he is seized by the spirit of the dead Person. It seen through the following incidence,

“If inside, the canvas is pushed aside, emerging silently, egungun. The laughter dies out gradually all eyes on the. . .The egungun continuous to dance… The dance of the masquerade becomes wilder, racked by spasms, the gradual build-up of possession… The egungun has become thoroughly possessed.”

Drinking and offering palm wine is another important tribal custom performs a mystic role in the play. In Yoruba Society, palm wine serves on the Special occasion to celebrate the festival or for the hospitality. In the incidence of the party, when Say Tokyo Kid after drinking a Palm wine, stabs a knife into the stomach of the Professor causes death of him.

Road used as symbol to influence the action in the play. It suggests a path leads to the destination, a kind of link between Professor and his victim illustrate pessimistic expression of the tragedy of the man’s life. It explores influence of the Nature over Yoruba People, acts as a vital role in the play.

*The Road* is a genuine work of Soyinka’s creative imagination with an unusual dependence on ritual design. Soyinka ridiculou the religion and its institutions with sharp tool of satire. The “agemo” mask dance is symbolic of change from life to death with the death of professor; the “Aksident Store” has got a new proprietor Kotonu. He suggests a qualitative change. The Road is built around the Yoruba cult of “Agemo”.

The “agemo” mask dance is symbolic of change from life to death with the death of professor; the “Aksident Store” has got a new proprietor Kotonu. He suggests a qualitative change. Soyinka deals with mysterious Religions as well as African rituals can be traced in the incidence of driver’s festival through a flash back. Again, the presence of Ogun Perform a vital role in the play. It seen through the character of Kotonu, with the masked figure actually possessed by Ogun, becomes the god surrogate.
*The Road* is dominated by myth and ritual. Ogun is the central idea around which the play has been constructed. The Yoruba believe that the god of road Ogun has to be offered sacrifices at regular intervals for the good of the users of the road. The Sacrificial animal for his celebrated in a festive mood with egungun mask dance and the drums.

The religious faith of the Yoruba Peoples is explored throughout the play. It explored through the character of Professor, who is the central figure in the play. He is a mysterious and absurd, perceived or misunderstood as a “millionaire”, “Madmen”, “new born fool” who sleeps in the churchyard with all that dead body like a tantric. Professor search revolves round wealth and power. He desires to strengthened his knowledge with the essence of christen religion, Ogun spirit and death. In order to achieve this, he wears various masks of a devotee, a preacher and a searcher. As a central figure Professor, professes Christian ideology, delivering Sunday sermons, his morning walk in search of “Rising Spirit” leaving behind the earthly spirit. Professor as a spiritual guide to the criminals it seen through religious jargon:

> “You may be the devil’s own army but my arm is powered
> With the unbroken Word!....They died, all three of them
> Crucified on rigid branches… My kindness would be plagued
> Be beggars if I gave them a chance… The butterfly thinks the
> flapping of his wings fathered the whirlwind that followed
> The burrowing beetle feels he powered the arm of the
> eruption … A gravestone turns slow and gentle on the hinge;
> angels trapped by day in illusions of concrete rise in night’s
> parole; the dead earth opens at your feet… Vermin. Judases
> you god-forsaken judases you sell your bodies and you have
> just done again have you not?... The dust in the belfry never
> quite settles. It only awaits the next clangour of the bell…Be
> like a bat. Keep your earth stuck to the vestry door.”

In another incidence, Soyinka represents corruption in the name of religion, when Professor operates crooks heaven called “Aksident Store” adjoining the church. Thus, Soyinka illustrates, Professor is a diabolic character, professing religion and serving spiritual needs for his own materialistic prosperity. He serves “spirit” i.e. palm wine to drivers so they might cause accidents and invite death to the passengers.
At the end Professor got trap in his trick when drunken person kills him. As said in Christianity “The wages of sin is death”, Professor meets his doom.

*The Road* is the first sustained presentation of Soyinka’s vision of the truth behind reality. Soyinka unfolds his plays with the use of various elements. Songs is one of the major elements makes the play interesting. It expresses life’s movement towards death that reduces everything into nothing. Each and every song discloses different aspects of actions, which takes place in the life of a human being. Thus, songs of Soyinka are a mode of experiences, human sufferings, quest, failure, disappointment, frustration, discouragement, hopelessness, ignorance, sense of insecurity, alienation, and dis-aggressiveness on the road of life and death.

Soyinka uses Yoruba language especially for the songs: the tonal rhythms of Yoruba are in tune with the drums and the dancing, and all three-language, music and action- are inseparable from the performance of ritual. Dance represents the blending of the religious elements in traditional Culture and Christian doctrine. As Soyinka comments, death is inescapable through the use of dance, mime, songs and music. Masque tradition is an important part of Yoruba people during dance. Soyinka draws attention to the unfamiliar use of the masque idiom, to the significance of death to the main characters. Samson and Kotonu recollecting their past life on the road while compare their indifferences towards the god’s through the expression of songs. Soyinka again throws a light on the mindset of the drivers. They perform worship towards god by sacrificing dog, but fail to prevent accidents. Hence, Songs and rituals constantly break through the surface of the drama and draw attention to this Yoruba dimension. Thus, Soyinka endeavors to clarify the relationship between the contemporary Nigerian life and Yoruba Myths through songs which heighten the effect of the play.

*The Road* is more thoroughly grounded on Yoruba background. It illustrates through the songs: the tonal rhythms of Yoruba are in tune with the drums and the dancing, and all three – language, music and action – are inseparable from the performance of ritual. Soyinka owes a great debt to traditional wisdom and culture which he fashions into a literary credo. The Play enacts a ritual of possession during which a god becomes apparent. It is a play that is more thoroughly grounded on Yoruba lore and especially in the mysteries of Ogun by blending the many themes and scenes artistically together; Soyinka has succeeded in creating a remarkable piece of theatre. Soyinka borrows basic Yoruba beliefs to produce an atmosphere for connect of living and the dead, the unearthly and the earthly, with the present, the past and the future is focused.
The Road profoundly influenced a Yoruba sense of the continuity between life and death and of the limitation of the human beings to get the knowledge of the universe. Its present attack on the crooked ways of politicians, scathing attacks on Nigerian politicians. At the same time, portrays the negative side of corruption in political, material/economic and religious area. Thus, The Road explores Socio, Political and cultural milieu of post independent Situation of Nigeria. All the characters are in the play are victim of political, and economic situation.

TO SUM UP
The Road is a very complex play, a combination of comedy and tragedy. The play shows the satirical and spiritual attitude of the dramatist. The subject of death, presented in The Road is found in an early poem “Death in the Dawn”.

The play is set along a road, the road from life to death. The characters in the play are the driver of a passenger-truck No Danger No Delay, Samson, a Captain of Thugs called Say Tokyo Kid and a splendidly pliable policeman, Particulars Joe and Professor, a dismissed lay-reader, but also the oppressively strange death – in – life figure.

The subject matter of the play is death. Everyone in the play is the servant, or agent, or priest, or student of death. The road itself is ruled by Ogun, the god of war and death and roads. Road accidents, which Professor, the missionary of death, helps to arrange by removing road sigs from dangerous points of the road, are Ogun’s High Masses. Drivers are the constant companions of death. Here death is described as a harvest. “Death is the select harvest of a faithful gleaner”’ says the Professor, using an agricultural metaphor.

The play is prefaced by Alagemo, a poem which provides clue to the play. The dance in the play symbolize suspension of the death. The theme of the work is life conceived of as a movement towards dissolution. The action of the play is arrest of time at the point where man is dissolving into the underworld. The characters play their distinctive roles in the play, whose title is suggestive, of the hazardous road in a stifling and a corrupting world. This bleak and difficult subject is enriched by a mulch of religious myth, Yoruba custom and tradition.

All the characters in the play are associated with some religion – either Yoruban – the local one, or Christianity – the foreign one.
Further Reading:

- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343156352_Wole_Soyinka's_The_Road_as_an_intertext](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343156352_Wole_Soyinka's_The_Road_as_an_intertext)
HAYAVADANA (1970)
GIRISH KARNAD

GIRISH KARNAD (1938-2019)
Girish Karnad is one of India’s foremost modern playwrights and a most renowned media personality. He was born in 1938 in Maharashtra and his initial schooling was in Marathi. He did his B.A. at Karnataka University, and his M.A. in philosophy, politics and economics at Magdalen College, Oxford. He was a Rhodes scholar there and on return to India he worked with the Oxford University Press in Chennai for seven years. He quit the job in 1970 and became a full-time writer. Besides being an internationally recognized “pre-eminent contemporary playwright”, he has also acted in a number of Indian films. His contribution to Modern Indian English drama is highly commendable and India recognizing his valuable contributions to it crowned his literary genius with the prestigious Jnanpith award.

Karnad, the multifaceted playwright’s works include Yayati (1961), Tughlaq (1964), Hayavadana (1970), Naga-Mandala (1988), Taledanda (1990), The Fire and the Rain and so on.

His first play Yayati (1961) reinterprets an ancient myth. Although this play is not translated into English, it is significant since it is Karnad’s very first attempt at play writing. This play also won the Mysore State Award in 1962. It is a drama on an episode in the Mahabharata.

Karnad’s second and perhaps his best-known play is Tughlaq, written in 1964. This play shows the transformation of a medieval character Mohammad bin Tughlaq. Hayavadana written in 1970 is one of Karnad’s most-performed plays. The play won him the Kamaladevi Award of Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972. Although the play was originally written in Kannada, it does not have any specific Kannada theme.

INTRODUCTION
Hayavadana is a play by Indian writer Girish Kanad. It tells the story of three protagonists, Devadatta, Kapila and their love, Padmini. Both friends are in love with the same woman and they accidentally swap heads. The meaning of the title is literally "horse face", and this is a reference to a man in the story with the face of a horse, who is seeking to become human.

When Karnad was a boy, in 1947, India became independent from British colonial rule, which among other things changed the face of Indian theater, which had previously consisted of performances of the works of William Shakespeare. Indian playwrights and directors wanted to break free from the constraints
that colonization had put upon them and consequently theater became more about classical dance, long-held religious ritual and legend, and Sanskrit. Years later, this time in Indian theater became known as the "theater of roots" period.

Karnad's *Hayavadana* comes from this period and as such contains the religious and ethical Sanskrit elements of the movement, but it also contains westernization in the form of Greek chorus and masks. Karnad was inspired by Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads* which in turn was inspired by an eleventh century Sanskrit text called the *Kathasaritsagara*. *Hayavadana* was originally written in Karnad's second language, Kannada, and he also translated it into English himself. It was first produced in Madras, India, by the Madras Players.

**OUTLINE OF THE PLAY**

The play opens with a prayer ritual performed by Hindus to the god Ganesha, who has the head of an elephant and the body of a boy. The Narrator asks that Ganesha blesses the performance that he and the assembled company are about to perform, and then tells the audience that the play is set in Dharmapura, before introducing the central characters, close friends Devadatta and Kapila.

A scream comes from offstage and an actor runs on screaming that he has just seen a man with the head of a horse and a human voice. The Narrator does not believe him and even when the creature enters he thinks a prank is being played and that the horse head is actually a mask. He tries to pull it off but realizes it is a real head. The creature is called *Hayavadana* and he explains that he is the son of a princess and a god in equine form. All he wants is to become a full man. The Narrator suggests that he goes to the temple of *Kali*, the Hindu goddess of death, because she is known to grant any wish that anyone has. Hayavadana does as he suggests.

After he leaves, the Narrator continues talking to the audience where he left off, explaining that the two young men are both in love with the same girl. Devadatta and Kapila enter and Devadatta tells of his love for Padmini. He claims he would sacrifice his hand and arms if he could marry her. Kapila agrees to find where she lives because he sees that his friend is truly lovesick. He goes to the street where she lives and knocks on every door until he finds her home. When she answers the door, he falls head over heels in love at first sight. He woos her on Devadatta's behalf but he privately believes that Padmini is too quick witted for him and that Devadatta is too sensitive for a woman like her.
Padmini and Devadatta are married quickly and all three continue to be friends. Padmini becomes pregnant with a son but Devadatta starts to believe that she is a little too affectionate around Kapila. They are planning a trip together but when he tells Padmini that he is jealous she offers to cancel the trip so that she and husband can spend more time alone. When Kapila arrives, though, she changes her mind and decides to take the trip as planned. As the trip progresses, Padmini pays Kapila a lot of compliments.

As Devadatta becomes more and more envious, they pass the temple of Kali, and he remembers his pledge to cut off his head if he were to be allowed to marry Padmini. When Kapila goes to look for him he finds his decapitated body and, in his grief, beheads himself as well.

The men are gone for so long that Padmini becomes worried. She sets off to look for them and when she finds their bodies, tries to kill herself as well. The goddess Kali appears to her and tells her that if she agrees to put the men's heads back on their bodies herself then they will be brought back to life. Padmini is so excited by this that she puts the wrong heads on the wrong bodies by mistake; the men come back to life but Devadatta's head is on Kapila's body, and vice versa. Everyone thinks this is quite funny at first, but when they get home, there are complications.

Both men feel that Padmini is his wife. Devadatta says as the head rules the body, she must be his wife, whereas Kapila argues that as the child she is carrying was fathered by his body then it is he who is her husband. After deliberation, Padmini elects to remain with Devadatta's head. Kapila is left behind.

The union between Devadatta and Padmini goes from strength to strength as she feels that this is a new, strong, improved version of her husband. When they buy two dolls to give to their new baby son, the dolls begin to address the audience and fill them in on what happens next. Over time, Devadatta's body reverts to how it used to be and he and Padmini start to fight a lot over the best way to raise their son. Padmini starts to think once again of Kapila. She takes her son to the forest to show it to him for the first time, and she finds Kapila living there. As Devadatta has lost physical strength over time, so has Kapila regained his. He accepts that he is fully Kapila. Padmini stays in the forest for several nights. When Devadatta finds them together he is distraught and the men decide to kill each other to end the rivalry once and for all. After they are dead, Padmini throws herself upon the funeral pyre.

The tragedy is offset by a man who comes onstage telling of a horse walking down the street singing the national anthem. Another actor joins him on stage with a crying child, who is Padmini and Devadatta's son. Hayavadana returns to the stage, and tells of how he asked Kali to make him complete, but rather than making him a complete man, she made him a complete horse instead. Padmini's son likes him and
the two sing and laugh together. Hayavadana wishes that his voice was not human and Padmini’s son tells him to laugh. As he does so, the laugh becomes less like that of a man and more like the whinnying of a horse.

The play ends with the Narrator heralding the mercy of Ganesha who has granted Hayavadana and Padmini’s son what they want. He begins to pray and is joined in this by Padmini, Kapila and Devadatta, thanking the Lord for the successful performance of their play.

**MAJOR CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY**

A **Bhagavata / the narrator** in Hinduism is a worshipper and he is also the play's Narrator and he gives the audience a synopsis of the characters' lives before the start of the play. He is able to talk to the characters during the play and he also reacts to the things that are happening, especially when he does not approve of one particular course of action or another. He is often more of an observer than the Narrator because he is also surprised and taken aback by much of what happens. His symbolic role in the play is to show the audience how unpredictable life can sometimes be.

**Devadatta** is one of the play's two main protagonists. Devadatta is a fairly sickly-looking man who is smart as a whip. His father is a Brahmin and he is both poet and political observer. He is close friends with Kapila at the start and the end of the play but feels a great deal of jealousy when he sees that there is a mutual attraction between Kapila and Padmini. Ironically, he becomes more jealous after he is married to Padmini and still sees his erstwhile friend as a rival. When his head is put back on Kapila's body he feels that he has the best of both worlds, because he has combined his wit with Kapila's strength - and he has Padmini! However, eventually his body starts to become what it used to be and he is swiftly returned to his soft, flabby form again, which leaves him feeling dissatisfied and grumpy.

**Kapila** is a muscular, dark man. He is the son of an iron-smith, and he is the brawn to Devadatta's brains. He is a man of courage and he has great daring and a sense of adventure. He is a far better friend that Devadatta gives him credit for; he talks to Padmini on his friend's behalf even though it is clear to him that they are a mis-match. He also cuts off his own head in solidarity with Devadatta when he finds his decapitated body. When Padmini chooses to remain with Devadatta's head on Kapila's body, Kapila goes into the forest and withdraws from society. He gradually regains his former fitness and physique but he realizes that this is a hollow, half-existence.
**Padmini** is a beautiful young woman who is the object of the desire of both Devadatta and Kapila. She chooses Devadatta because she is turned on by his intelligence but she comes to realize that her sharp tongue is too much for his sensitive nature. She is also very attracted to the physicality of Kapila. Although it is a complete accident when she puts the wrong heads back on the wrong bodies, it does seem that Padmini is now able to have her cake and eat it too, because she gets the mind that she adores atop the body she craves. This is only fleeting, though, because when the bodies of the men start to readjust back to the way they used to be, she is quickly dissatisfied with her lot again. Padmini is left alone twice by the men, as they kill themselves and leave her twice. The second time she kills herself too, having been dissuaded from doing so the first time around by the goddess Kali.

**Hayavadana** is the eponymous character in the play. Hayavadana does not appear that much and is not the protagonist at all. He is a man with the head of a horse - or a horse with the body of a man, depending on your perspective. He wants desperately to be made complete and desires to be made a full man. At the Narrator's suggestion he asks Kali to bless him with this but we find out that although she acceded to his request to be made whole, she elected to make him all horse rather than all man.

**Kali** is the Hindu goddess of death and she appears to most of the characters during the play. Devadatta sacrifices his head to her. She does receive both men in the end but only because Padmini has put the wrong heads on the wrong bodies. She makes Hayavadana a full horse but in doing so demonstrates the perception that the Hindu gods don't really pay attention and can create as much havoc as good.

**MAJOR THEMES IN THE PLAY**

**Hybridity**

One of the main themes of the play is that of creatures that are hybrids of different things. The title character, **Hayavadana**, is a hybrid of a man and a horse, and even **Kapila** and **Devadatta** end up being hybrids of each other. At the start of the play, being a hybrid is something godly and special; the opening prayer is to Ganesha, a god who is a boy with the head of an elephant. He is the lord and master of perfection which is paradoxical given his appearance. However, as the play continues, the hybrid characters seem less and less perfect to themselves and all ultimately feel that they are incomplete because they are not fully one creature or another.

**Incompleteness**
The theme of being incomplete is personified by all of the characters. Devadatta and Kapila are brain and brawn respectively, but neither feels truly complete. This is mirrored by Padmini. She chooses to take Devadatta as her husband but she still finds herself longing for the physicality of Kapila. She feels incomplete because she has been abandoned twice by the same two men, which emphasizes her own incompleteness to her.

Devadatta and Kapila feel a sense of incompleteness after they have each other's bodies joined to their own heads. At first it seems that Devadatta gets the best deal because he has the strengths of both himself and his friend. He gets to keep his own sharp mind, and also has the muscular physique of Kapila. Kapila has his own strength of mind but has Devadatta’s soft, unathletic body. He begins to feel incomplete as soon as the switch has occurred; however, when both men start to find that their bodies are returning to their pre-switched state, they still both feel incomplete because they realize that they are living half existences.

The most obvious example of incompleteness is Hayavadana. He wants to be made fully a man but Kali makes him fully a horse instead. Even when she does so, he feels incomplete because he still has the voice of a man. When he is able to change this and achieve the "neigh" of a horse instead he finally feels that he is complete.

**Conflict Between Body and Mind**

The play's minor theme is the way in which the heart seems to rule the head; the heart wants what it wants, even when the mind is steadfastly wanting something else. Although Padmini is initially attracted to Devadatta's mind, she realizes that she is physically attracted to Kapila and it is this desire that is ultimately much harder for her to overcome.

**The Role of Bhagavata**

The Bhagavata’s role is crucial in the play, since he performs a great variety of functions. The very play begins with him offering worship to Lord Ganesha. He is the narrator-figure of the play and unites the two plots present in it. He cleverly introduces the theme of the play in his invocation itself. Bhagavata is the one who introduces the major characters of the story and keeps the audience informed of the major developments of the play. It is he who informs the audience of the marriage of Devadatta and Padmini in Act I and the rishi’s verdict on the problem of the transposed heads in Act II. He also has his own songs, which reveal him as a choric commentator on the action. He appears both in the main-plot as well as in the subplot. At times he reveals the minds of the major characters and at times those that of the minor
characters. He is also found assisting the stagehands as and when necessary. At the end of the play he leads the benedictory final prayer. In short it could be said that this narrator-figure, Bhagavata is “an avatar of the Sutrardhara in ancient Sanskrit drama.

**Indianness in Karnad’s Hayavadana:** Hayavadana is originally written in Kannada, a regional language of India. The play is rooted in Indian mythology and the playwright has used many Indian myths, symbols, techniques and traditional practices that help in emphasizing the many different themes of the play. Hayavadana’s very beginning consists of an invocation to the ‘Elephant-headed’ Ganesha. India, a virtually Hindu dominated country holds Ganesh as a God to be worshipped at the very outset of starting of a thing. Thus, the Bhagavata, an important character in the play starts the play with his verses of praise of Lord Ganesha. The portrayal of this practice is essentially Indian, since in English dramas we rarely come across such practice. The very depiction of the Bhagavata who plays a multirole in the play brings the image of the Sanskrit Sutradhara in our minds. His introduction in the play gives it a native technique and could be categorized as an Indian play. Considering the marriages that take place in the play, it could be noted that the marriages are performed in typical Indian manner. As is usual of Indian middle-class families, Kapila goes and arranges for Devadatta’s and Padmini’s wedding. Although Devadatta falls madly in love with Padmini, he does not directly propose to her. Instead Kapila makes his way to the bride’s place, to negotiate for their marriage.

This is typical of Indian custom wherein the persons to be married do not negotiate for themselves. Rather on either side someone approaches the guardian of the other concerned. When Kapila reaches Padmini’s house on behalf of Devadatta, Padmiini has a witty and bold conversation with him. Kapila does not tell anything about Devadatta or the reason of his arrival to Padmini and kept on seeking for her father, mother, brother or even the servant of the house. Padmini’s witty speech turns into shyness and blushes and she runs away from the place, when Kapila revealed the reason for his visit. When knew about her marriage proposal her wits go away and the typical Indian female shyness and modesty overtakes her. The tale of Hayavadana’s parents’ wedding also proves this. Hayavadana’s mother was a Princesss of Karnataka at the time of her marriage. Her father had arranged for a ‘Swayamvara’ to find a husband for her. Suitors from different Kingdoms like China, Persia and Africa arrived to try their luck. Hayavadana’s mother was then attracted to a white Stallion who was actually a cursed Ghandharva. This stallion was her choice in the ‘Swayamvara’ and hence she was married off to it. Leaving apart the strange choice of the Princess, this incident reminds one of the typical Indian royal way of finding a match for the daughters
according to their choice. It also reminds one of the similar weddings of Draupadi and Sita in the Mahabharata and Ramayana respectively.

The Indian custom of sacrificing at the Gods’ and Goddesses’ altar and the Indian scene of Gods and Goddesses awaking at the climax point of sacrifices is present in Hayavadana. Devadatta offers his head to Goddess Kali, although he promises it to Lord Rudra. He promises his two arms for Mother Kali. But in a frenzy of jealousy against the relationship between Kapila and Padmini, he mistakably offers his head to Goddess Kali. Kapila seeing his friend dead chooses to sacrifice himself in the name of friendship and hacks off his own head. Padmini, terrified at the two deaths helplessly tries to behead herself. When she is about to cut off her head, she is stopped by Goddess Kali’s voice. Kali prevents her from hacking off her head and also gives life to the two dead men. This is typical of many Indian mythological stories that deal with Gods and Goddesses. Padmini performs Sati, an age-old practice by which married Indian women who lose their husbands, meet death by burning themselves. Although Sati has almost become an extinct practice now a day, this episode of Padmini performing Sati bears an Indian imprint. Thus, Hayavadana, being an Indian play has inevitably exhibited much of Indianness in it.

Further Reading:

OUR COUNTRY’S GOOD (1988)
TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER (1944- PRESENT)

Timberlake Wertenbaker is a New York born British writer raised in France. A daughter or a writer and a journalist, Wertenbaker’s interest in writing and language is no surprise and having started her career lecturing in Greek and French. Wertenbaker moved to London in the early 1980s where her career in theatre developed. In 1984, she became the resident writer for the Royal Court and this relationship culminated in the development of Our Country’s Good, an adaptation of Thomas Keneally novel The Playmaker.

INTRODUCTION

In Our Country’s Good, Wertenbaker explores how drama and language can be a refuge from the hopelessness of the grim conditions of supposed rehabilitation facilities and comments on the ineffectiveness of the justice system in reintegrating inmates into society.

When it opened at the Royal Court, Wertenbaker was awarded an Olivier award which was shortly followed by nominations for six Tony awards on Broadway. Much of the success of the play can be attributed to its exploration of what it means to be human. Wertenbaker used the context of 18th century transportation to explore human morality in extreme circumstances. Out of this emerges horrendous cruelty, which Wertenbaker describes as the extreme lows of humanity, and remarkable survival, the extreme highs.

During the 18th century, the British government used transportation as an alternative punishment to hanging. Convicts were transported to colonies in order to serve their sentence, a solution which boasted the double benefit of removing these undesirable individuals from society as well as being cost effective. Initially penal colonies were established in America; however, the War of Independence (July 1st 1776) disrupted this practice and in 1787 the first penal colonies were established in Australia. It is estimated that around 160,000 people were sent to the Australian penal colonies and records show that children as young as nine years old were sent for even minor crimes with the standard sentence being 7 years.

The first of these groups is referred to as “The First Fleet” totaled 1,030 people, comprised of 300 soldiers and around 700 convicts. Conditions on the ships were extreme, the voyage lasted 252 days and 48 people died during this time. The incentive for the soldiers to accompany the trip as jailers was the promise of establishing a new colony in Australia where they could thrive and prosper, though in reality many of the
marines felt they had been sent as punishment for losing the war in America. Records indicate that The Recruiting Officer was the first dramatic production performed in Australia. The convicts formed the cast of the play and were directed by 2nd Lieutenant Ralph Clark to celebrate the King’s birthday on June 4th 1789.

**OUTLINE OF THE PLAY**

*Our Country's Good* was written in 1988 for a specific company of actors at The Royal Court Theatre in London and is based on a true story of convicts rehearsing a play. Actors and writer engaged in an intensive two-week workshop researching the themes of the novel 'The Playmaker', by Thomas Keneally upon which the play is based. The final version of the play was presented in conjunction with 'The Recruiting Officer' and was directed by Max Stafford-Clark who identified the main themes as the human ability to transcend circumstances, the potential of theatre to change lives and the power of language.

The play follows the true-life story of a group of convicts who having been deported to the colony of Australia, found themselves required to act in a production of George Farquhar's comedy 'The Recruiting Officer' which was staged in the penal colony of New South Wales in 1789. The actual production was the responsibility of Ralph Clark, an idealistic young lieutenant, who believed the drama would be a more salutary lesson than public hanging. How ironic then, that the choice of Farquhar's play should show British officers in such an unflattering light.

*Our Country’s Good*, by Timberlake Wertenbaker, is a play that begins in the hold of the vessel *Sirius*, a convict ship. The ship is on its way to Australia, where the British Empire notoriously shipped criminals to get them away from the British Isles. At the start of the play, convicts aboard the *Sirius* witness a flogging and speak fearfully about what lies ahead. In Australia, in Sydney Cove, an Aboriginal Australian comment on the arrival of the first fleet and the British Empire’s presence in Australia. At first, he is curious, but that curiosity soon turns to confusion and fear.

The play then focuses on four British men who have just arrived in Sydney. Their ranks and names are Governor Arthur Philip, Captain Watkin Tench, Captain David Collins, and Midshipman Harry Brewer. They are engaged in a debate about the purpose of imprisonment. On one side of the debate is the idea that it is to punish criminals and on the other side, that it exists to rehabilitate them. They also debate whether or not criminals are born as such, or whether crime is a learned behavior. Tench tells the others that the convicts are entertained by hangings, so the governor orders the midshipman to find a hangman. There are three criminals who have been found guilty of stealing food, and they
will be hanged. But the governor also wants the convicts to put on a play, as less violent entertainment.

*Our Country’s Good* features a play within a play. Other dramatic works that do this include *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare and *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn, among many others. Harry has two of the three thieves hanged, but then is filled with guilt. One of the thieves, whose name was Handy Baker, was after the adoration of a woman Harry also pursues. Her name was Duckling Smith, and she was a convict. Harry shares the governor’s plan to put on a play with Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark. Ralph decides he will lead the convicts in performing the play. He thinks if he does this, the governor will notice him and perhaps grant him favor. For the play, Ralph selects *The Recruiting Officer*, a comedy written by George Farquhar during the Restoration period in England, which took place during the latter half of the seventeenth century.

As Ralph casts convicts in the play, officers continue to debate criminality and punishment. Some of them oppose the performance of a play, while others support it. They vote as to whether or not the play should continue, and a majority vote in favor of it, so Ralph is allowed to continue his work and to plan the rehearsals.

Duckling gets a part in the play by complaining about Harry’s attentions. Several of the other female characters argue. One of them cannot read; another feels unequal to playing the part she’s been given. The hangman, whose name is James “Ketch” Freeman, tells Ralph that he’s innocent of the charges that landed him Australia. He doesn’t want to be a hangman, but when he was convicted, he was told he had to hang or be hanged. One thing after another goes wrong, and the first rehearsal is a complete mess that leads to many of the convicts being imprisoned. Because of this, Ralph wants to put a stop to the play. He tells Philip this, but Philip insists he continues the play. He wants to prove that incarceration can have a rehabilitating effect on convicts and believes the play will serve that purpose.

Meanwhile, Harry is visited by the ghosts of the two men he had hanged. Ralph begins a second rehearsal, during which some of the convicts show improvement in their roles while Ross humiliates some of the others, forcing them to show off their scars from being flogged. Harry and Freeman prepare for the third hanging. A woman named Liz is to be executed for stealing food, but she insists she is innocent of the charge. Harry is continuously visited by ghosts and he collapses. When Ketch
returns to the play, the other convicts refuse to act with him because he’s the hangman. The rehearsal ends.

As is common with plays within plays, the characters also discuss the purpose of a play. Each of the officers has his own ideas of what a play’s purpose should be.

Duckling swears to love Harry, but when he collapses, he dies. Ralph and a convict, Mary, rehearse privately, which leads to their confessions of mutual love. The officers discuss Liz’s fate, and allow her one more opportunity to speak up and defend herself. Collins insists they have a retrial but Liz delays with a promise to perform in the play anyway. Before the play begins, the convicts discuss their plans for afterward. Some want to try to escape. Others plan futures together. The play begins and, from the start, receives uproarious applause.

Our Country’s Good (1988) is a history play based on real events that took place in the eighteenth century among the first convicts transported from England to Australian penal colonies. Conditions were extremely harsh there, but Wertenbaker’s play focuses on the convicts’ staging of George Farquhar’s romantic comedy, The Recruiting Officer (1706). This actually occurred at Sydney Cove on 4 June 1789 the first ever performance of a European play on Australian soil. Wertenbaker uses the play-within-a-play to explore themes of crime and punishment, the impact of colonial expansion, hierarchies of class and gender and, above all, theatre’s potential to transform individuals and societies. At its premiere in 1988 at the Royal Court theatre, Our Country’s Good was staged alongside The Recruiting Officer featuring the same cast, so that both actors and audience were free to explore the parallels and intersections between the two plays.

**MAJOR CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY**

**Captain Arthur Phillips**

In the play, he is the Governor in Chief of New South Wales and has come out of retirement to do this job. He aims to make the prisoners believe that they are not slaves and have a hope for the future. Throughout the play he encourages Ralph Clark to continue with the play and is seen as a fair and wise person.
Major Robbie Ross
He fought and lost in the war against America which he believes is the reason why he was sent with the First Fleet to Australia. Throughout the play he is a bitter and negative person. He does not want the play “The Recruiting Officer” to happen and tries to stop it at every point by creating tension between the convicts and Lieutenant Ralph Clark. Eventually, he is always overruled by Captain Arthur Phillips.

Captain David Collins
Collins was sent over to be the judge in the colony. He always converses from a legal standpoint and justifies all his answers. A key moment in the play is when Collins conducts a vote to determine whether or not the play goes through. He sides with Ralph Clark in this vote and helps him throughout the play.

Captain Watkin Tench
Tench is a character that hates all the convicts simply because they are convicts. He does not believe that the convicts can become members of society again and always makes sarcastic side comments about them. He is the complete opposite to Phillips in that he believes that they do not deserve redemption and will never achieve it.

Captain Jemmy Campbell
He is said to be drunk the entire play, he is always mumbling and never makes coherent sentences. He constantly follows Ross and agrees with everything he says while finding the convicts in the play amusing.

Reverend Johnson
Johnson is not a very prominent character in the play. He was supposed to provide moral guidance to the convicts and the officers. He is very concerned with what the play portrays religiously and focuses more on that than any other matter.

Lieutenant George Johnston
Johnston is also not a main character in the play and is known for treating woman sinners with compassion. During the vote he votes for the play.
Lieutenant Will Dawes
Dawes is the colony’s astronomer and he couldn’t care less about the convicts or the officers. He agrees to the play going ahead as long as he doesn’t have to watch it.

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark
Ralph is an officer that is trying desperately to get a promotion. He tries to take on every responsibility so when he hears about the play he immediately agrees to direct and organize it. He starts off shy and scared of women but grows into a character who falls in love with a convict and becomes more and more assertive. His attitude towards the convict change, heavily influenced by Phillip and he ends up treating the convicts far better.

Second Lieutenant William Faddy
Faddy is against the idea of the play because he does not like Ralph Clark. He only appears in one scene (Act one, Scene six) where he constantly makes snide comments to Ralph and expresses his distaste for him through insults directed at Ralph.

Midshipman Harry Brewer
Harry Brewer is also an officer but the lowest ranking one. He is haunted by the ghost of Handy Baker, a man he hanged and struggles to find his place in the colony. When he got to Australia, he became involved with convict Duckling Smith. He becomes very overprotective and jealous and watches over Duckling constantly. Eventually, he dies, with Duckling crying at his side.

An Aboriginal Australian
The Aboriginal watches the colony from the moment they set foot in Australia. He regards them with curiosity and caution. He ends up catching a common disease they bring with them as he breaks out with red bumps everywhere.

John Arscott
Arscott is a convict. He is hopeless and opposed to optimism. This approach is heightened when he discovers that the compass, he bought from a sailor is a north arrow drawn on a piece of paper. He becomes the most invested in the play and feels that when he acts his role, he feels nothing and forgets about his life as a convict.
**Black Caesar**

Caesar is originally from Madagascar and wishes to join the play. After begging for a role, he ends up being Worthy’s servant (A silent part) and beats the drum for Kite. Despite all this, he ends up getting stage fright and needs to be threatened by the other actors in the play.

**Ketch Freeman**

He was transported to Australia for killing a sailor who broke a strike. He claims that he didn’t do it, that the blame was placed on him unfairly. He becomes the hangman of the colony after being given the choice to hang or be hanged. Ketch struggles to fit in as he is loathed by the other convicts, especially Liz Morden. He is desperate to act in the play but no one wants to go near him. He also blames his situation on leaving his ‘guardian angel’ in Ireland.

**Robert Sideway**

Sideway was sent to Australia for pickpocketing. He reflects fondly on his days pickpocketing outside the theater and tries impress Ralph with his knowledge. He tries to fit in with the officers and act like an upper class man but continues to become frustrated and slip out of it. He speaks of knowing many things about theater but his acting is over-dramatic and humorous in the first rehearsal. In the final scene, he mentions that he wants to start his own theatre company which is supported by the other convicts volunteering to help write and act.

**John Wischammer**

Wischammer was arrested for stealing snuff. He claims he is innocent and struggles to fit in with Liz Morden and Ross’ anti-semitism. He taught himself how to read and is widely knowledgeable in many areas. He writes an alternate prologue to the play (which contains the title “Our Country’s Good) but Ralph rejects it as it would upset the officers. He wishes to stay in Australia after his release and write plays.

**Mary Brenham**

Mary Brenham is a shy girl who was dragged into stealing by the man with the initials “A.H” tattooed on her thigh. She gets hauled to the auditions for the play by Dabby Bryant and ends up getting accepted after only reading a few lines. Her and Ralph fall in love and imagine a future together however there is always a power dynamic imbalance with Ralph believing he is better than her because she is a convict.
Dabby Bryant
Dabby Bryant is Mary’s best friend and constantly speaks about returning to Devon. On the ship, she sold Mary to a sailor on the ship in exchange for extra food rations for them both however she does care about Mary. Bryant’s opinion on the play is that it’s stupid and she also dislikes her part as she argues it should be more relevant to the situation, they are in. Nevertheless, she seems to enjoy taking part in the play. In the final scene she decides she will try and escape that night.

Liz Morden
Liz Morden was known as the most troublesome convict in the colony. Governor Phillip tries to make an example out of her by showing that she can be redeemed. He does this by putting her in the play. At the end of the first act she is accused of stealing food but she does not try to defend herself because she believes it is not worth it because no one will listen. Through the play she develops self worth and starts to deny the allegations against her.

Duckling Smith
Duckling was a thief and a prostitute and was sentenced to death at 18 years old. She is taken in by Harry Brewer as he is in love with her and allows her to sleep in his quarters. She also gets treated better than the other convicts as she has been claimed by an officer. The feeling is not mutual until Harry is on the brink of death when she confesses her love for him.

Meg Long
Nicknamed “Shitty Meg,” she is a procurer of sorts for the other convicts. Her appearance in the play is when she mistakes the audition as a call for women.

MAJOR THEMES IN THE PLAY

Theatre as a socializing tool
Throughout the play, we are able to see that the convicts become more humane and less as the criminals that we first encountered in the play. This is especially seen through characters such as Liz Morden and 'Shitty' Meg. We see increased socialization through Liz as she is able to maintain friendships with the other characters and, in the final scenes of the play, she is willing to give her life to protect her friends as she fakes a confession that she has stolen from the stores.
Power of Language
This is a vital theme throughout the play as it also links to the power of theatre. The power of language can be seen by the effects that the play *The Recruiting Officer* which the convicts are performing has on their individual character and personalities. A clear example of this would be Dabby. When first starting the play, she is a very abrasive character who struggles to maintain relationships. But by the end she is able to become friends with the other convicts and displays a clear bond with them.

Rehabilitation vs. Capital Punishment
This theme underlies the play on a whole especially in the scene where all the officers are discussing their view on the topic. Characters such as Captain Arthur Phillips are able to show a more liberal viewpoint as he shows the intelligent belief in reform and that they have the power to reform the convicts to become better people. However, characters such as Major Robbie Ross believe the opposite as they think the punishment for the convicts should be as harsh and severe as possible so are clear supporters for capital punishment.

Colonization
This theme is most clearly expressed by the Aboriginials. We are able to see the effects that colonization has on the original settlers and it allows for internal debate within the audience as to our personal views on the matter. We are able to see the obviously negative effects towards the end of the play as the Aboriginal becomes diseased and covered in pus and infections. This shows the physical harm that humans cause on the planet and when they take over land that was not originally their own. It is also symbolic for showing how humans are destructive of nature and are braze with their actions as the consequences are never thought about.

Further Reading:
- https://www.benchtheatre.org.uk/plays90s/ourcountrysgood.php
- https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-our-countrys-good
- https://americanplayers.org/plays/our-countrys-good
CHINUA ACHEBE (1930 -2013)

Chinua Achebe was born in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria n 1930. His father was one of the early Ibo converts to Christianity who was an evangelist and teacher in the church Missionary Society’s village school. Chinua attended his father’s school and having started to learn English at about the age of eight. He went to Government College in 1944. In 1948, he entered University College and began to study medicine in Ibadan where he graduated in 1953. After teaching for a few months, he joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1954 as a talks producer and then became Head of the Talks Section (1957) and Controller, Eastern region (1959), to become Director of External Services in 1961. His job took him on long journeys about Nigeria and, as he drove, his mind was busy reviewing the history and life of his people and casting this mass of unique material in the classical fictional patterns he had studied at the university. This resulted, in 1958, in the publication of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*. It was an immediate success and he won the Margaret Wrong Prize. *No Longer at Ease* was published in 1960 which won the Nigerian National Trophy. *Arrow of God* came out in 1964 and his fourth and last novel, *A Man of the People*, appeared in 1966.

With the massacre of the Ibos in Northern Nigeria in 1966 and the beginning of the Nigerian Troubles, he resigned from the Broadcasting Corporation and moved back to Eastern Nigeria. During the civil war he taught for two years in the United States. The Biafran conflict and his experiences with the war have had a profound effect on Achebe. He wrote about these effects in several essays (*Girls at War* 1971, a collection of short stories which concern the war.) He was trying to show how an experience with such a tragic war can change one’s attitude to life.

INTRODUCTION

*Things Fall Apart* is the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe’s first novel. It was published in 1958, two years before Nigeria became independent in 1960. It is easily the most widely read text of African literature worldwide. The novel deals with the theme of colonial encounter. Although British presence in Nigeria goes back to the 18th century, Britain took firm control of Nigeria by the 1880s. In recognition of the strong presence of Britain in West Africa, Nigeria was ‘given’ to Britain at the Berlin Conference of 1884 where European powers divided Africa among themselves to avoid conflicts. Thus, the British colonial period in Nigeria is from 1885-1960.
The time of action in *Things Fall Apart* is the late 19th century, around the 1890s, and the place of action is Umuofia, a fictional village in Eastern Nigeria. The dominant ethnic group in Eastern Nigeria is the Igbos—the Yorubas being the major ethnic group in Western Nigeria.

*Things Fall Apart* is about the rise and fall of a self-made man called Okonkwo. In spite being the son of an unsuccessful father, Okonkwo emerges as an important leader of his community due to his hard work and determination. However, Okonkwo perishes in his attempt to resist the sweeping changes introduced by the colonial rule. While the first part of the novel depicts Okonkwo’s rise as a key member of his community, despite the handicap of being the son of an unsuccessful and ‘effeminate’ father, the later part of the novel describes the fall of Okonkwo due to his inflexibility and flawed understanding of the values of his culture.

**TITLE**

The novel takes its title from W B Yeats’ poem titled “The Second Coming” (1919). Achebe uses the following lines from Yeats’ poem as an epigraph:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

However, Achebe does not use these lines merely for the sake of novelty or as an embellishment. There is in Achebe a deep understanding of Yeats’ vision of history and civilization which is outlined in Yeats’ non-fictional work titled *A Vision* (1925).

**STORYLINE**

The novel, *Things Fall Apart* is about a small village in Nigeria called Umuofia. The novel is divided into three chapters. At the end of the nineteenth century the Europeans came to West America where they tried to impose their culture and their religion to the Africans. All inhabitants of Umuofia belonged to the same clan which meant that they shared the same customs and helped each other. The whole village was very religious. However, they had their own religion because they believed in several gods. In same way the people lived isolated because they had no contact to the rest of the world. They were farmers and produced things such as palm oil, that they used to cook. One of the village’s leading person Okonkow. He really had great influence on the other people. However, the relationship to his son was difficult
because he was scared that his son Nwoye would grow up like his grandfather Unoko who did not work hard enough. One day life in Umuofia changed completely. The Europeans came and destroyed the neighbour-village. At the first moment the people were totally shocked of the white men. Then missionaries from Europe went to Africa because they want the Africans to become Christians. The white men worked very hard to persuade them. Consequently, more and more people were exploited by the white men and joined the new religion.

Okonkwo could not trust his eyes because now his ideas were not so important anymore. The white men gained more and more influence. The brought a new kind of government, built new courts and judged people who disobeyed the new laws. The missionaries built new churches, hospitals and now schools were started. It was a great thing for many inhabitants because they could learn to write and read. Apart from these facts the Europeans improved trading and Umuofia was getting rich. While the others were interested in the new religion or the new government Okonkwo tried to preserve his customs. Even his son joined Christianity and Okonkwo was left alone with his ideas. Only his best friend Obierika could understand him but he knew that there was no way out because the people only saw the good things the white men had brought. The white men spread control over the whole village. Okonkwo could not bear the pressure and decided to punish the white men for what they had done. He killed one chief official. Afterwards he noticed that life would never be like in the old days. In his opinion there was no other solution and he committed suicide.

MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

Okonkwo

The principle character of *Things Fall Apart* is Okonkwo. At the beginning he is a strong man who fights against things he doesn’t agree. Whenever he is angry and can’t get his words out quickly enough, he uses his fists. He has no patience with unsuccessful men because he cannot imagine being not successful. He is a wealthy farmer, has just married his third wife and he is a man of war that make him one of the greatest men of his time. However, he also has faults but he is always too proud to admit that he is mistaken, which his clansmen see as a defect in his character. In all, on the good side he is brave, hardworking and energetic but on the bad side he is unbending and inflexible, unwilling to change his traditional way of life. He knows that the people of Umuofia will not fight with him. However, he can’t live with this people who have destroyed his world and consequently he chooses to commit suicide, the most shameful way to die for a man like he was.
Unoka

Unoka, his father, is the opposite of Okonkwo. He is weak, idle, improvident, unsuccessful and interested in the softer and more kindly aspects of life. Okonkwo tries as much as possible to be unlike his father. He is ashamed of Unoka.

Nwoye

Nwoye is like his grandfather which makes Okonkwo feel angry. He does not want to have a son like his father. So, he keeps beating Nwoye and exactly this is the wrong thing he does because Nwoye is very sensitive and begins to be afraid of his father. At first, he hesitates to join the Christians, but his father’s violence and opposition finally drive him away to attend the mission-school in Umuofia. The new religion gives some sort of answer to the problems that have troubled him before.

Ezinma

Ezinma is Okonkwo’s favourite daughter and she has all the qualities that Okonkwo is fond of. So much so, Okonkwo often wishes that Ezinma were born as a boy. Despite his fondness for her, however, Okonkwo never expresses his affection for her for fear of being considered unmanly—in his view display of affection is a ‘womanly’ quality.

Obierika

Obierika is a man who thinks about things. He is a man who will obey the law but not blindly. Although he does not know what to do about the established order of things when he feels it to be wrong, he nevertheless questions it. He sees how men’s faiths must adjust to new circumstances and not bring destruction by blind adherence to the old ways.

Thus, we have fathers (Unoka and Okonkwo), sons (Okonkwo and Nwoye), son-like characters (Ikemefuna), and daughters who the fathers wish were sons (Ezinma). Then there are a couple of other character among whom the more important one is Obierika. Obierika is Okonkwo’s best friend. He is a wise man and Okonkwo respects and admires him. The character of Obierika acts as a counterfoil to that of Okonkwo in the novel. While Okonkwo is a man of action, Obierika is a man of thought, and he often corrects Okonkwo’s misunderstanding of the values of his culture.

Then there is the character of Uchendu, Okonkwo’s maternal uncle in whose house Okonkwo takes shelter during the seven years of exile from Umuofia. It is Uchendu who exposes Okonkwo’s faulty
understanding of the cultural values of his community, particularly of the importance of the female principle.

**THEMES IN THE NOVEL**

The main theme of *Things Fall Apart* is that of change and the effects on society. New ideas in religion, in law, in political, economic and social structure have their effects on people. These affects have often been noticed in history, for example, when a country has changed its political system (as in revolution) or when an agriculture-based economy has changed to one based on industrialization. Violence is often a result of such changes. The tragedy of Okonkwo is one expression of that violence. There must have been similar tragedies in history when similar characters have tried to oppose change.

The central of the novel is, of course, colonial encounter—the encounter between an indigenous culture and the alien values introduced by colonialism. However, there are several other important themes in the novel and one of them is the theme of the father-son relationship. As mentioned earlier, there are father and sons in the novel and the relationship between them is anything but simple. Unoka is an unsuccessful father and his son Okonkwo rejects him. In fact, the one fear that rules Okonkwo’s life is his fear of being considered a failure like his father. However, despite achieving ‘success’ his own son Nwoye deserts Okonkwo. The father-son relationship is further complicated by father and son-like figures. Ikemefuna grows up calling Okonkwo ‘father’ and he is the kind of son Okonkwo would have liked to have. Ezinma is Okonkwo’s favourite child and the father often wishes that she were born as a son. Sons abandoning fathers and fathers losing sons are a major tragedy in a culture that looks at the father-son relationship as representing the link between the past, present, and future.

Another important theme is the perceived opposition between masculinity and femininity or the male and the female principle. Okonkwo’s life, we are told, is dominated by two fears: the fear of failure and the fear of being considered womanly. He, therefore, pursues success doggedly and banishes from his life everything that he considers womanly—such as music, stories, display of affection and so on. He never expresses his affection towards his daughter, or towards anyone for that matter, as he considers a display of emotions—except the emotion of anger—as a sign of weakness. But ironically, Okonkwo constantly comes into conflict with the female principle: he commits a female crime, and seeks shelter in his maternal uncle’s village during his exile. It is during his exile that Okonkwo’s uncle tries to make Okonkwo understand the importance of the mother. Okonkwo does not also realize that the supreme power in his Igbo culture, which he considers a manly culture, is Ani, the Earth Goddess. Thus,
Okonkwo’s flawed understanding of the place of the female principle in his culture becomes a major cause of conflict in the novels.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is another important theme in the novel. Okonkwo resists change and strives to preserve what he understands as the traditional values of his community. However, as Obierika, the wise friend of Okonkwo often tries to tell him, tradition is not static and change is inevitable. But Okonkwo fights against a change that is inorganic and imposed and he perishes in that attempt. Thus, besides colonial encounter, the father-son relationship, the opposition between masculinity and femininity, and the conflict between tradition and change are some of the important themes in *Things Fall Apart*.

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE**

Although Achebe uses the ‘western’ genre of the novel, and the colonial language English, he tries to bring in the features of indigenous oral narratives into the written text. Some of features of oral narratives that we can observe in the novel are the use of proverbs and their immediate explanation as if to a live audience; the use of the community’s narrative voice instead of an individual’s; offhand and casual references to history and to the origins of the community; stories within stories where individual stories are often complete in themselves; foreboding (the very first reference to Ikemefuna describes him as the “doomed lad” and his story as a “sad story”).

Prominent feature of oral narratives is the use of proverbs. Part I of the *Things Fall Apart* abounds in proverbs while they are more or less absent in Part III. Proverbs are culture specific and Achebe uses their presence and absence in different parts of the novel as an indicator of the changed values of the community. Early in Part I, we are told that “Among the Igbo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten”. However, by Part III, which is dominated by the white man’s point of view, the perspectives changes and the District Commissioner finds their “love of superfluous words” an “infuriating habit”. The use of proverbs is possible only when people share certain common values and in third part of the novel which portrays the disappearance of precisely such a common understanding, the use of proverbs becomes meaningless. Thus, Achebe varies language, and the sentence structure to signify the change in the values of the society.

**TRAGEDY**
*Things Fall Apart* is often read as a tragedy in the classical Greek sense of the word. We can see Okonkwo tragic hero—a noble character involved in a battle with forces much bigger than himself and ultimately falling because of a fatal flaw. In the case of Okonkwo, the fatal flaw would be his lack of a nuanced understanding of the core values of his society. However, Achebe’s novel is more than the tragedy of an individual. It is also the tragedy of a community and a way of life. It is the tragedy of a society whose downfall is brought about by a combination of internal weaknesses and external attack. Besides superstitions and inhuman practices, the greatest flaw of the Igbo community is their lack of foresight. It is a community that is seen to be living only in the present with an inability to foresee the future in conceptual terms. However, the downfall of the community is catalyzed by the intrusion of an alien culture and the interruption of its evolutionary process by the colonial rule. Thus, the end of the novel brings us back to its beginning, to the title which indicates Achebe’s agreement with Yeats’ view of the collapse of civilizations as the result of a coalition between internal flaws and external pressures.

CONCLUSION
To sum up, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a classic portrayal of colonial encounter. In this novel Achebe offers a sympathetic, yet a critical insider’s view of the Igbo community. Through this novel, Achebe seeks to counter the myth of Africa manufactured and perpetuated in colonial discourse. In particular, by treating Africa as a subject rather than an object, Achebe presents an alternative to the image of Africa found in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. *Things Fall Apart*, thus, is a valuable novel in itself because of its content and form, but is also a seminal text for its contribution to African literature as a whole.

Further Reading:
- [https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/26/after-empire](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/26/after-empire)
- [https://literarydevices.net/things-fall-apart-themes/](https://literarydevices.net/things-fall-apart-themes/)
Lord Vidiadhar Suraj Prasad, a descendant of indentured immigrant workers from India, Naipaul was born in Trinidad in 1932. Naipaul, today, is perhaps the most celebrated and the most widely read Caribbean prose author who writes in English. Born to Droapatie and Seeopersad Naipaul who was a self-taught journalist and a published creative writer. Naipaul grew in the multicultural milieu of rural Trinidad. Through his mother, Naipaul is a descendant of Capildeo’s (Kapil Dev) family, which enjoyed considerable economic and political clout in Trinidad. In 1983 in his "A Prologue to An Autobiography" (1983) Naipaul describes how his father’s reverence for writers and for the writing life spawned his own dreams and aspirations to become a writer.

Naipaul completed his schooling from the Queen’s Royal College in Port of Spain and in 1950 won a Trinidadian national scholarship to study in Oxford. In England Naipaul met Patricia (Pat) Ann Hale whom he secretly married in 1955. Patricia was his first reader and critic. Naipaul’s marriage to Patricia ended when she died in 1996. In 1996, two months after the death of his first wife Naipaul married Nadira Khannum Alvi, a British journalist of Pakistani origin. Naipaul adopted Nadira’s daughter from an earlier marriage as his daughter.


Naipaul is also a prolific author of nonfiction. Since the 1960s Naipaul has emerged as a powerful political and cultural critic. He courted several serious controversies. He is known for his strong and often objectionable remarks on various subjects including India and Islam. However, Naipaul is celebrated for his unique literary style and the range of subjects his writings deal with. His prominent works of

Naipaul wrote extensively on varied themes. His works are set in India, Africa, Caribbean islands, and England. His subjects included Indians, people of Indian, African, and Caribbean origin, the white skinned colonialists, the decolonized subjects from the third world who now constitute the diaspora. Naipaul’s fiction largely deals with the longing for a home. The lead characters are self driven, ambitious and are worthy of their education. Their quest drives them toward displacement and exile. Towards the end of the novels, their quest notwithstanding, Naipaul lead characters are defeated by the socio-political milieu.

For instance, *A Bend in the River*, which begins with the sentence “the world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it” deals with the travails of Salim, a progeny of immigrants from South Asia to Africa, who was forced to relocate from the East coast of African to its hinterlands. Salim works hard and manages to prosper through his shop when the change in the political structure and the subsequent decolonization ruins the business. Salim is forced to abandon his shop and seek refuge overseas. He is thus coerced to migrate twice in his life. *A House of Mr. Biswas* portrayed the protagonist longing for owning a house. *The Mimic Men* describes the personal and political travails of the businessman politician Ralph Singh, who returns to the Caribbean island after completing his education in England. Ralph dabbles in island’s politics and is exiled by his former friends. A deeply hurt Ralph returns to England.

Willie Somerset Chandran is perhaps the most displaced amongst Naipaul’s protagonist. The lead character in the novel *Half a Life* and its sequel *The Magic Seeds*, Chandran migrates from India to London and then to Africa. The political uncertainty in the African nation forces him to shift to Berlin. Chandran is disappointed with life in Berlin and his sister arranges for him to shift to India and fight alongside the communists. Chandran does not share the enthusiasm of his comrades. However, left with no option Chandran participates in the movement. He is arrested by the Indian state. On his release he settles down in England. Naipaul is often criticized for painting a grim picture of postcolonial societies.
He depicts the post colonies as lawless, crumbling societies which are ruled by inept and corrupt megalomaniacs.

Naipaul is often accused of essentializing various communities. His writing is complex and his political views are often contentious and contradictory. At a literary event held in New Delhi in 2002, a few hours after he delivered an address which dealt with the anguish of the exile in Britain. Many Indians found Naipaul’s views expressed in the Indian trilogy *An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization, India: A Million Mutinies Now* rather intolerable. Naipaul’s writings indirectly helped the rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the world. Various reactionary forces, at various times, have appropriated his writings.

**INTRODUCTION**

Listed amongst the 100 best novels written in English language in the twentieth century, V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas* is one of the most significant novels to have been written by a Caribbean author. The novel describes the travails of the protagonist Mohun Biswas, who seeks to own a house in Trinidad. The novel is set in the first half of the twentieth century. Even as the novel depicts the desires and insecurities of Mohun, it rather humorously depicts the lives of the various members of the gregarious Tulsi household. The novel provides a commentary on the relations between sexes in Indo-Trinidadian society, also throws light on the complexities of race and of impending exit of the colonial rule in the island.

*A House for Mr. Biswas*, published in 1961, won V.S. Naipaul immediate international recognition. Naipaul based his novel on the life of his father Seepersad Naipaul. Seepersad Naipaul, a son of indentured Indians, was a self taught writer. At a very young age, Seepersad, an emaciated yet ambitious young man, was married into the influential Capildeo (Kapil Dev) family. The novel is set in the first half of the twentieth century and all the main characters in the book are Trinidadians of Indian origin.

*A House for Mr. Biswas* portrays the dynamics of the Indo-Trinidadian community. It throws light on the superstitions, and the culture of the emaciated descendants of Indian origin on the island. The description of the lifestyles of the Ajodha and the Tulsi family is a record of the detail.

The action in the novel is situated in the first half of the twentieth century, a period which witnessed massive political changes across the world. It discusses the genealogy of coolie—the indentured labourer
from various parts of South Asia, to Trinidad. It portrays the prejudices and the malice prevalent in the Indian community residing in Trinidad. It depicts the troubles that the community faces to keep its religious (Hindu) and caste identities intact. The novel demonstrates that the Indian community in Trinidad, despite its contestations, is cultivating ‘hybrid’, and ‘hyphenated’ identities.

**STORYLINE**

Bipti and Raghu Biswas are second generation descendants of indentured labourers of Indian origin residing in Trinidad. The couple produce four children Pratap, Prasad, Dehuti and the youngest Mohun Biswas. Mohun Biswas is born on a dark night at his maternal grandparents’ home with six fingers. The Pandit declares that Mohun is an inauspicious child who will cause his father’s death and warns that the child should be kept away from water. Mohun is not sent to school and is instead asked to take care of his neighbour’s calf. When Mohun, for the first time in his life, comes across a lake he is distracted with the sight of water. The calf meanders away. Scared of reporting the loss of the calf, Mohun silently comes home and hides under the bed. The family is worried and searches for Mohun. As the villagers inform Raghu that Mohun was spotted near the lake, Raghu repeatedly dives into the lake and is drowned.

With Raghu’s death the family disintegrates. Pratap and Prasad are sent to stay with relatives from their paternal side, while Bipti, Dehuti, and Mohun reside with Tara. Tara is Bipti’s sister. She is married to Ajodha and the couple are childless. The couple is rich and own many commercial enterprises. Mohun is sent to school, while Dehuti is assigned domestic chores. Unable to stay with the Ajodhas Dehuti elopes with Ramachand, a ‘low caste’ domestic help. Mohun is pulled out of school and is sent to apprentice with Jayaram, a Hindu priest. Mohun is unsuccessful and comes back to stay with the Ajodha family. At the Ajodhas’ home Mohun cultivates a love for books. He reads extensively. Mohun is sent to stay with Bhandat, the younger brother of Ajodha and assist him in the liquor business. Bhandat, a ‘lecherous’, ‘womanizing’, ‘spendthrift’ who is constantly cheating Ajodhas and the customers, distrusts Mohun. Bhandat manhandles Mohun and forces him to leave the shop.

Mohun decides to look out for himself. He seeks out his school friend Alec, and begins to paint signboards. An assignment takes him to Tulcis’ shop. He sees Shama at the shop and instinctively writes her a love letter. The letter lands him in trouble as the Tulcis interpret it as a proposal for marriage. The wedding is quickly arranged and performed at the Tulcis’ residence—the Hanuman House. Mohun and
Shama are asked to stay in one of the many rooms in the building. Mrs Tulsi and her brother in law, Seth, want Mohun to work in their shops.

Mohun is not prepared for a married life and finds the environment in the Hanuman house stifling. He yearns for independence and constantly finds means to express himself. Very early into his marriage he realizes that the Tulsi household does not provide any reasonable means to live an independent and contended life. The marriage produces four children. Mohun heartily dislikes the gargantuan Tulsi household which he finds regressive. He rebels at every opportunity, tries to ascertain his independence on every occasion and wants to break away from the Tulsis. He detests every member in the household. He names Mrs. Tulsi the ‘old queen’ and the ‘old hen’. He calls Seth ‘big boss’ and the ‘big bull’. He dislikes the highhandedness of his brothers-in-laws Owad and Shekhar whom he mockingly calls ‘gods’.

He is repelled at the sight of Hari, the son-in-law who serves as the spiritual leader of the household. Hari’s obsession with his illnesses, his food practices, and religious books irritate Mohun. He distrusts Padma who is the wife of Seth. Mohun tries to seek the company of the rustic and illiterate Govind. Govind betrays Mohun’s trust as he reports Mohun’s complaints to Seth. Residents at the Hanuman house brand Mohun a trouble maker. Mohun is often humiliated and is isolated. On one occasion Govind manhandles Mohun. For Mohun the Tulsis come to signify a decadent old order, which is crumbling and has no place in the contemporary world which is constantly making and remaking itself. He deems himself trapped by circumstances and wants to escape from the situation, reclaim his agency and live life on his terms.

The Tulsis finally give away and allow Mohun to run a shop on one of their properties. For the first time in their marriage, Mohun and Shama live independent of the Tulis. Mohun becomes a shopkeeper and his family resides in a house located behind the shop. Initially Mohun is successful at managing the shop. However, at Shama’s insistence Mohun gets the shop ‘blessed’. Mohun gets into trouble and is in a legal case. Mohun loses the shop and the family is forced to return to the Hanuman House.

Mohun, however, does not live with the Tulsis for long. He rebels and is employed as a driver and an overseer on the family’s plantation estate. Mohun’s family is forced to live alongside ten other families in the barracks. Mohun resents the housing arrangement and the nature of his job. He is inept as an overseer. He tries to build his own house on the plantation. However, due to financial constraints he is
forced to compromise on the quality of the raw materials and ends up procuring a weak house. The frail house is destroyed during a storm and Mohun is devastated.

Mohun is forced to return to the Tulsi household again. He is emotionally estranged from them, moves to live with his sister in Port of Spain, and begins to seek employment in the city. Luckily, soon enough he lands up a job as a journalist with the *Sentinel*. As a journalist Mohun is sensational and is not very efficient at his job. Mohun relocates his family to Port of Spain. He begins to enjoy his independence and the new job. He aspires to become a writer. He buys a typewriter and types a few sentences. Mrs. Tulsi intervenes again and manipulates the situation. Mohun and Shama reside as tenants at the family house in Port of Spain. Mohun’s new job wins him the friendship and respect of his brothers-in-law. Shekhar is married to Dorothy, a Presbyterian of Indian origin. Owad leaves for England to study medicine at Cambridge. Seth and Mrs. Tulsi begin to disagree on most things and the Tulsis seem to be on the verge of breaking up.

Mrs. Tulsi and her children, along with their families, move away from Arwacas to set up a new house on a plantation at the Shorthills. Much to his irritation and discomfort Mohun is also forced to relocate to the new house. He achieves professional success and begins to build his own house on the estate. An accident leads to the house being burnt down. As the tenants at the Tulsi house in Port of Spain vacate, Mohun begins to reside in Port of Spain. As a Community Welfare Officer, Mohun begins to enjoy his job. He focuses on the education of Anand, buys a car, and seems to be finally at ease with life. However, as various members of the Tulsi also relocate to Port of Spain, Mohun finds the house inhospitable and finds the environment stifling.

To add to the crowd Owad returns from England. Though trained as a doctor, his Marxist views notwithstanding, Owad is as regressive and prejudiced as any other member of the Tulsi household. Owad is overbearing and fights with Anand. His arguments with Mohun lead to a massive argument between Mohun and Mrs. Tulsi.

As the Community welfare department is disbanded, Mohun goes back to being a journalist with the *Sentinel*. He is now a seasoned journalist. His daughter Shama and son Anand win scholarships and find their way to England. Mohun is clearly middle aged and searches for a house of his own with more vigour. He finally finds a house, arranges a loan with the Ajodhas and buys it. The house is not as perfect as it looked and its faults render it dysfunctional. He realizes that the previous owner has cheated him.
Mohun suffers a series of heart attacks and is diagnosed with serious heart ailment. Mohun is in debt and is disappointed that his son and he do not share a warm relationship. However, he finds solace in the fact that Savi has proved to be an intelligent and a warm daughter. Mohun is gradually retired out of Sentinel, and the newspaper hires Savi instead. Mohun steadily reconciles to life and towards the end of his life he begins to live a contended life. Mohun, towards the end, succumbs to a heart attack.

MAIN THEMES IN THE NOVEL

Explication of the idea of house

Mohun’s efforts towards the owning a house is a metaphor of his quest at finding his space in the modern world. Mohun seems to be a complex character whose family deems him to be a fickle minded, adventurous and misguided man. Mohun is alienated from his family members and seeks to find a place of his own. Naipaul has stated that the character of Mohun was inspired by his father’s life. Seepersad Naipaul found himself choked amidst the Capildeo family. Like Mohun, Seepersad was quite alienated with his surroundings and craved for a better life. He constantly sought opportunities to improve himself and advance his goals. Naipaul remembers his relatives making fun of his father’s efforts. Despite several humiliations and insults, Seepersad focused on making and remaking himself. His efforts paid off as Seepersad made his living as a journalist, became an author, owned a house and educated his sons in England. In a relatively short lifespan of five decades Seepersad, who was born to emaciated, almost illiterate and indentured labour couple accomplished many of the objectives that he set out for himself.

Mohun’s quest at owning a house emerges as a very significant marker. Even as the Tulsis laugh at his attempts to own a house and live an independent life, Mohun carries on with his quest. He tries to build or buy a house on several occasions. Every time fate intervenes and his efforts are nullified. The quest seems to be a doomed affair, notwithstanding the small awards that come his way. Even as he seeks to own a house of his own, Mohun buys a bicycle and graduates to driving a motorcar. He is employed in office spaces which are meant for learned men where he can wear suits to work. His children win scholarships to study abroad. He finally buys and moves into a two storied house, which he realizes is full of defects. Yet, very unlike him, Mohun is reconciled to its defects.

Mohun yearns for space, dignity and recognition; hence he seeks a house of his own. Space, dignity and individual recognition are a testimony of a person’s agency in modern society. Mohun is the only truly modern individual in the novel. He has comprehended that the old colonial order is being replaced by a new chaotic milieu and is aware that the new world brings in opportunities. Ironically, many members of
the Tulsi household who initially mock Mohun, gradually copy him and strive for better jobs and education for their children.

The breakdown of conventional societal structures

A House for Mr. Biswas depicts the breakdown of societal structures among the Indian community in Trinidad. Since nineteenth century people of Indian origin who stayed on in the islands as indentured labourers strove hard to keep their identities intact. Though severely emaciated and poor, these labourers wanted to retain the caste hierarchies on the island. They practiced religious and caste rituals (and often created new rituals) to mark themselves as culturally distinct from the other communities. These religious and cultural practices provided the Indian community with a sense of identity. The Indian community often looked up to the family structure to uphold it sense of community. The family was expected to teach its children the cultural rituals which in turn made the children a part of the Indian community.

However, within a span of a century these bonds became weak. Notwithstanding the periodic visits to India and the regular visits of religious leaders from South Asia to the islands, the Hindu community in Trinidad faced a severe identity crisis. The crisis occurred due to several reasons including the rise of nationalism in the islands, the weakening of the colonial structure, the change in the political economy of the island and the migration of the young people to England. Naipaul points out that the indentured labourer could work on the plantation. The plantation offered work to a large section of the population. But in the twentieth century, as plantations gave way to the service industry, an individual had to be clever. The struggle against the colonial rule and the demands for self rule brought together the black and the Asian populations.

MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

1. Mohun Biswas
Ambitious, progressive and diligent son of indentured, poor parents, Mohun is a self-taught, self-driven man. He becomes a respected official and a journalist in Trinidad. For most part of the novel he is seen as an anomaly, however, by the end of the novel all other characters in the novel follows him and seek to advance themselves. Often, he takes more responsibility than he can handle and thereby most of the tasks that he has initiated are either left incomplete or are performed haphazardly.

2. Shama
The long-suffering wife of Mohun she is torn between the old order (her family) and her husband. She is religious, skeptical and conservative and seeks to maintain the status quo. She handles every trouble that Mohun brings in. By the middle of the novel she stops protesting against Mohun’s outlook but silently seeks to restore order into the family’s life. Mohun, towards the end of his life, acknowledges that Shama is a better judge of circumstances. She is an excellent mother and it is due to her initiatives that her children are housed, and fed at the Tulsis’ household.

3. Mrs. Tulsi
She is the matriarch of the Hanuman House and has an iron grip over the lives of her children. Mohun derogatorily calls her the ‘old queen’ and the ‘old hen’. She uses both financial and emotional modes which ensure that her daughters and their families stay within her control. She heavily relies on Seth, but towards the second half of the novel she falls out with him. She disapproves of any change in her household. She is conservative Hindu woman, who does not educate her daughters and marries them off as young brides to almost illiterate men. However, she takes great interest in the education of her sons. Her control over the household diminishes as the novel progresses. Her sons do not abide by her values.

4. Seth
Termed the ‘big bull’ by Mohun, after the death of Pandit Tulsi, Seth emerges as the patriarch of the Tulsi household. Bound to the Tulsis by marriage, Seth is a burly, unethical businessman who handles the business affairs of the Tulsis. After the death of his wife, the Tulsis distance themselves from him and he suffers serious business losses. Even his nephews do not reconcile with him.

5. Owad
A favourite of the Tulsi household, Owad is the younger son of Mrs. Tulsi. He leaves for England to pursue his higher studies and only returns towards the latter half of the novel. Owad is unable to accommodate cultural values that he was taught in Trinidad with modernity that he was exposed to in England. For the progressive discourse that he dispenses, Owad is intolerant and bossy. His strong views that Indians from the subcontinent do not adhere to caste dharma, and his highhanded behaviour towards Anand are indicative of the fact that his education in England has not really changed him. Towards the end of the novel, Owad (like his elder brother) marries a Presbyterian and moves away from the Tulsi household.
6. Savi
The eldest child of Mohun, Savi grows up in the Tulsi household and despises her father. Mohun tries his best to win her over to his side and gifts her toy house. Though Mohun does not display much interest in her education, Savi also wins a scholarship to study in England. She returns as a strong, independent, capable journalist who loves her father and financially supports him during his last days.

7. Anand
Anand as a child is very attached to his father, Mohun. Mohun invests time, energy, money and hope into Anand’s education. Anand is a diligent, sensitive and studious boy. He wins a scholarship and goes to England. However, the emotional bond between the father and son snaps and Anand seldom writes back to his father.

8. Ajodhas
The wealthy and childless Ajodha couple are the extended family of Mohun. They are Mohun’s guardians. They have a soft corner for diligent and intelligent young men. Despite their calculative behaviour Ajodhas financially aid Mohun as and when he asks them. They are meritocratic and are less prone to be influenced by family and caste ties.

Further Reading:
MARGARET LAURENCE (1926 – 1987)

Jean Margaret Wemyss was born in 1926 in the prairie town of Neepawa, Manitoba. She lost her parents at a very young age and was raised by her maternal grandfather. Margaret began writing professionally in 1943 when she got a summer job as a reporter for the town newspaper. In 1944, she enrolled herself in the English honours program at Winnipeg’s United College. After graduating, she became a reporter for the Winnipeg Citizen. In 1947, she married Jack Laurence. In 1949, Margaret Laurence moved to Somalia with her husband and lived in Africa till 1957.

She wrote a number of short stories on African subjects and maintained a great interest in African literature. In 1957, Margaret Laurence returned to Canada and settled in Vancouver. After separating from her husband in 1962, she moved with her two children to England. It was at Elm Cottage that Laurence completed four of her five Manawaka books, of them the first being The Stone Angel (1964).

The great critical acclaim and commercial success of her novels as well as her consistent output of essays and articles solidly established Margaret Laurence as one of the most important and beloved literary figures in Canada. In 1971, she was named a Companion of the Order of Canada. She received the Governor General’s Award twice, first for A Jest of God (1966) and again for The Diviners (1974). Her book of essays Heart of a Stranger was published in 1976 and her memoir Dance on the Earth was published posthumously in 1987. Laurence had also written The Olden Days Coat (1979), Six Darn Cows (1979) and The Christmas Birthday Story (1980) for children.

During the last decade of her life, Margaret Laurence was actively involved in speaking and writing about issues that concerned her such as nuclear disarmament, the environment, literacy and other social issues. She died on January 5, 1987 and was laid to rest in Riverside Cemetery in Neepawa, Manitoba.

PLOT OF THE NOVEL

The Stone Angel, published in 1964, is set in the fictitious town of Manawaka, Manitoba in the early 1960s.

In The Stone Angel, there are two interdependent plots. In terms of the present time, it is the story of an old woman in her 90s whose physical breakdown has made her dependent, and who realizes that her son and daughter-in-law are planning to send her to an old people’s institution. Her pride rebels against such
an identification with the helpless aged, and one day she escapes from her Vancouver house to spend a couple of days in an abandoned fish cannery. Inevitably, she is recaptured and taken to a hospital which shall be her last home. It is in the hospital that she realizes that all her life she has been a victim of her pride. She dies not long after this realization.

Within this primary plot which lasts only a few days set in the 1960s, goes another plot in which the old lady Hagar Shipley recollects her long life in a series of flashbacks. There is one crucial period of two years that, in contrast to the other vividly remembered periods, goes virtually undescribed. This is the two years when old Jason Currie, Hagar’s father decided to spend his money on educating Hagar in an academy in Toronto. The effect of these two untold years is evident throughout the novel. In her long inner monologue, Hagar expresses herself in a way quite different from her Manawaka contemporaries and quite unlike Marvin, her son and Doris, his wife, the people to whom in old age her circle has slowly narrowed down. It was her educated mind within her gross and worn out body which acted the way Hagar behaved with the people surrounding her. So, the plot of The Stone Angel, keeps something hidden and open to conjecture. In this way it draws readers into the heart of the novel by alerting them to the possibility that Hagar may be telling the truth as she sees it, but it is not necessarily the whole truth. Readers need to recognize that her telling is based on her memories and that memories, like opinions, can be biased. The novel is, in fact, somewhat like an autobiography.

**THEMES OF THE NOVEL**

**Pride:** The most prevailing theme of The Stone Angel is that of pride. Indeed, Hagar’s great pride helps her to cope with the many difficulties she faces throughout her life. This pride, however, also separates and detaches her from others resulting in several strained relationships which she was unable to mend. Hagar’s pride repeatedly imprisoned her within the confines of thwarted affections and misdirected emotion. More specifically, her pride caused such things as an unhappy marriage with Brampton Shipley and a severance of all ties with her father Jason and her brother Matt. Her pride served her best in her dying days when she was determined not to submit to frailty and raged against the fading light with the same stubbornness that she had always displayed.

The novel has its first reference to pride in the very second sentences as it begins. Hagar described the Stone Angel as “my mother’s angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty…” (3) Hagar’s father Jason Currie was a very proud man himself, a trait that was passed on to his daughter. He took immense pride in the terribly expensive statue created for his wife. He also prided
himself in his abilities and had excessive self-esteem. Because he worked very hard, he took great pride in his store. Hagar says, “Father took such pride in the store – you’d have thought it was the only one on earth. It was the first in Manawaka, so I guess he had due cause.” (9) Hagar inherited her father’s pride and exhibited it as early as age six when she said, “There was I, strutting the board sidewalk like a pint-sized peacock, resplendent, haughty, hoity-toity, Jason Currie’s black-haired daughter.” (6) This pride grew as Hagar grew up. She was frustrated at her lack of co-ordination and her arthritis which caused her to fall.

The alternation that runs through Hagar’s life between rebellion and conformity is a result of her pride. Her pride, in its turn, has a paradoxical quality. On the one hand she is sustained by her pride and on the other she is humiliated “hourly and daily” by the vulnerability her age has imposed on her. In the unbending pride of her spirit there is an enormous strength. She comes to her final hospital bed and along with it she also comes to her moment of truth and liberation, the recognition of the force that warped her own life and her love for others. That force is her pride. The author leaves no doubt that Hagar’s pride is the spiritual pride that was regarded as one of the seven deadly sins by the medieval theologians. The readers are not told, but perhaps they can surmise that her snatching of the cup of water in her last moment is a symbol of her release from the agony of memory into the great peace beyond life.

**Time:** In *The Stone Angel*, time is the most important factor in determining the structure of the novel. The assertion of temporal dominance occurs a number of times in the novel. Hagar, leaving Bram, and at the same time leaving her hometown, comments on her departure: “Then we were away from Manawaka. It came as a shock to me, how small the town was and how short a time it took to leave it, as we measure time” (147) It is through her sense of time that Hagar measures the space of Manawaka. And then, coming to Vancouver, she voices a sentiment: “You begin again and nothing will go wrong this time.” (155) For it is time, not place, that manifests itself in change arising from a change of mind or heart rather than a change of place, and time is mind’s dimension.

The novel consists of alternating passages from a past and a present, both of which exist within Hagar’s mind. She is either remembering or perceiving the world around her with an old woman’s suspicious eyes which give her observations their special twist and colour. It opens with Hagar recalling the stone angel in her rich and racy inner prose, the prose of thoughts readers are expected to believe are addressed to them. And then Hagar describes the cemetery and suddenly switches to the present. From this beginning until about the last quarter of the book, *The Stone Angel* maintains parallel chronological
patterns, the present following sequentially the last days of Hagar’s life, and the flashbacks following, also sequentially, the course of her life as it appears in her memories.

In terms of action, this is a book of narrow compass, the narrative of an old woman’s thoughts and memories on the eve of death, with a single quixotic escapade, to break the pattern. Death circumscribes the whole pattern, for the novel begins with memories of a cemetery and ends with Hagar’s last expectant thought – “And then-”.

Survival: In ‘Ten Years’ Sentences’, Margaret Laurence has stated: “With The Stone Angel, without my recognizing it at the time, the theme had changed to that of survival, the attempt of the personality to survive with some dignity, toting the load of excess mental baggage that everyone carries, until the moment of death.” (32) Three years after Laurence wrote this essay, Margaret Atwood’s Survival appeared (1972). Though Atwood has made only three brief references to The Stone Angel in her book, Laurence considers her novel a story of liberation and frustrated attempts at liberation in a generational context. Hagar’s long life is an often failing effort to find and be herself, and in that sense to achieve liberation. In reality, survival itself is a kind of conditional and limited liberation from the prime necessity of human existence, which is death.

Freedom: Freedom is linked to survival and also linked to the theme of hostility between settlers and hunters that has dominated the entire history of North America. The contrast between Bram Shipley and Jason Currie which appealed to Hagar is that between the rigidities of the invading mercantilism represented by her father, a strict Presbyterian self-made man and the vanishing liberties of the frontier represented by Bram. In Bram, she sees all those qualities which are different from her father and it is those very qualities which she begins to detest when she goes to live with him. Again, the pride factor comes in the way of liberty and freedom. It is this pride which leads to her isolation and eventual destruction of all her personal relationships.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE
In the novel The Stone Angel, the stone angel is a symbol, an object which has a special role. It symbolizes Jason Currie’s pride when he sets it up, nominally as a monument to his dead wife, but really to “proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied”. (3) It is the dynasty which, in a bitterly ironic twist of fate, expires with him. But, the statue also symbolizes Hagar’s blind refusal to recognize her own nature and the consequences of her pride: “She was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even a pretence of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank.” (3) Finally, the statue symbolizes the way in which
Hagar shares the obstinate, arrogant disposition of Jason Currie, and even his attitudes to life. Pride is the besetting sin of both of them, which makes them often strangely unfeeling. The idea of those unmoving eyes recurs when Hagar’s son John is killed and she says: “The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all”.

**CENTRAL CHARACTER OF THE NOVEL**

Margaret Laurence herself wrote, “I wrote about Hagar as one individual old woman who certainly came out of my own background. But I was astonished when a number of other Canadians wrote to me or said to me that this was their grandmother. And I didn’t know that it was going to turn out to be everybody’s grandmother.” Readers identified Hagar Shipley as the type of the arrogant old woman fighting against age and death.

Hagar Shipley is sustained by her pride and she is made monstrous by her pride. She is ninety years old when her voice is heard for the first time, and she bitterly describes herself as grossly fat, ugly and clumsy. Her body has grown as grotesque as her unforgiving spirit. She is by turns agonizingly bitter, snarling and sarcastic or weak, vulnerable and weeping. Her son Marvin and daughter-in-law Doris, themselves in their sixties, have to bear with her hour by hour and day by day. They have to bear her stubborn, intractable temper and her massive, unmanageable body. She is humiliated hourly and daily by being so vulnerable, and yet she is impeccably unyielding to them in their honest efforts. She is unhappy for her age, her weaknesses, and for the failures in her life. Yet, in the unbending pride of her spirit there lies an enormous strength. She journeys through memory to recall her life, face its failures and admit her betrayals, and she makes one last desperate bid for escape from the chains of illness and age. She comes to her final hospital bed, but she also comes to her moment of truth and liberation, the recognition of the force that worked her own life and her love for others: “Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free...” (292)

Hagar’s pride is a factor of her background, both ancestral and historical. Her father Jason Currie was a relentlessly proud man. The little western Canadian town, Manawaka, was built by Jason Currie and other Scottish immigrants like him and was made secure by the pride of its builders. Manawaka was also potentially a prison for its people who were ruthlessly restricted by its propriety.

Readers are never allowed to look directly into the minds of Jason Currie or Bram Shipley in *The Stone Angel*. They are seen only through Hagar’s eyes, heard through her ears. Readers know about them what
Hagar chooses to let them know. She often describes their appearances and eccentricities and sheds some light on their special ways of speaking. Hagar does not turn either her father or her husband into mere puppets in her memory or her imagination. Yet, she always shows them as her foils, the *others* by whom, in her great egotism, she defines herself. She never has an unreservedly good word to say about any of them. In her vision of life, everybody else is a minor figure. Consequently, the novel has no real dialogue. The characters never truly converse. They exchange statements that are embedded in the great sprawling continuum of Hagar’s memory, and their encounters are stylized in recollection. Everything readers know about them is secondary, filtered through the principal character’s thoughts.

Hagar’s prejudices and her resentments stand out for all to see, and readers are on guard all the time for the bias that sooner or later emerges in all her statements. Her fear and suspicion of the world colour her relationships with everyone. Whatever she says is based on her memory and people like Hagar remember the distant past with great vividness. But are the memories of old people, however vivid, the real past? In all works of fiction that are based on remembering the past, the readers must regard memory itself as the first creator of fiction. But whatever that past may really have been, it has made Hagar into what she is, the woman whose voice is brilliantly introduced in the first pages of the novel. It is this voice that sings throughout the novel till she goes through her last rite. As Hagar is laid to rest Mr. Troy, the minister, sings: “All people that on earth do dwell.” and readers realize that throughout her life Hagar has not recognized the need for joy. It can only be hoped that in the last moment of her life her mind had been enlightened and her heart opened up.

**LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE**

*The Stone Angel* is important for it came at a crucial stage in the development of Canadian fiction, which was moving forward from its formative stages. It was moving away from the stylistic clumsiness of writers like Frederick Philip Grove, who sought to see prairie life in terms of an outdated European naturalism and from the didactic earnestness of writers like Hugh MacLennan who, in novels like *Two Solitudes*, had given lessons in the rise of a Canadian national consciousness. Published in 1964, *The Stone Angel* is a study of the enclosed “garrison culture” of North American settlements and of the religion that supported and often distorted the spirit of their people. W.H. New remarked that Margaret Laurence explored the essential differences between middle class expectations and other values, articulated a female perspective, and offered evidence to many young writers to affirm the simple fact that being alive was a political act.
Laurence came at a time when MacLennan’s didacticism had served its purpose, and myths were needed to sustain the Canadian imagination. In creating her fictional town of Manawaka, Margaret Laurence offered a powerful myth of Canada in the imaginations of artists and responsive readers. Her role as a woman novelist at that time was also crucial. She built on the pioneering achievements of earlier writers like Sarah Jeannette Duncan and Ethel Wilson to shift the literary point of view from a dominatingly male one to the activity and significance of women in Canada.

Finally, there are changes in attitude to form that began to appear in Canadian fiction during the 1960s. Margaret Laurence as a creative writer was ahead of the fashionable critical trend of the 1960s which tended to based on the identification of themes. Her novel harps on an idea, the idea of survival. Thus, for many reasons, *The Stone Angel* stands as an influential book in the development of Canadian literature during the 1960s and the subsequent decades. *The Stone Angel* has survived because Hagar Shipley is a universal personification of the urge to survive. Both Hagar and Manawaka, though fictional, have survived in the memories of the readers as symbols of the Canadian spirit of survival.

**AWARDS AND RECOGNITION**

*The Stone Angel* is one of the selected books in the 2002 edition of *Canada Reads*. The novel has also been adapted into a movie called *The Stone Angel* by Kari Skogland in 2007. Ellen Burstyn as Hagar Shipley had won the Genie Award for best performance by an actress in a leading role in 2008.

**Further Reading:**

- [https://literariness.org/2019/01/01/analysis-of-margaret-laurences-novels/](https://literariness.org/2019/01/01/analysis-of-margaret-laurences-novels/)
KHALED HOSSEINI (1965 - PRESENT)
Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan, the setting of much of the action in *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini and his family moved to Paris in 1976, then immigrated to the United States in 1980 as refugees with political asylum. Hosseini's parents, a former diplomat and a teacher, settled in San Jose, California, where they subsisted on welfare until his father, working odd jobs, managed to independently support the family. Hosseini received a biology degree in 1988 from Santa Clara University and a medical degree from the University of California, San Diego in 1993. As of 2005, he is a practicing physician, specializing in internal medicine in Northern California.

Hosseini published several stories before writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which was based on an earlier short story of the same title. As a doctor with an active practice and many patients, Hosseini struggled to find time to expand the story, so he wrote the novel piecemeal in the early morning hours. Hosseini contends that treating patients made him a keen observer of people and the ways they express themselves, both verbally and nonverbally. In 2004, Hosseini was selected by the Young Adult Library Services Association to receive an Alex Award, an honor given to the authors of the ten best adult books for teenagers published in the previous year. Also, in 2004, he was given the Original Voices award by the Borders Group, and *The Kite Runner* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His next novel, entitled *Dreaming in Titanic City*, is slated for publication in 2006.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Kite Runner* progresses through much of the historical turmoil of contemporary Afghanistan, starting with King Zahir Shah, who was overthrown by his cousin Daoud Khan in 1973. The communist party then took power in 1978, which led to The Soviet War involving Russian forces and US-backed mujahideen guerillas. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the country became the Islamic State of Afghanistan, but violent infighting between parties continued. In 1996 the Taliban, an ultra-conservative Islamic group, took control of the country and began imposing a strict and violent religious rule. *The Kite Runner* ends soon after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center by al-Qaeda terrorists, the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the fall of the Taliban.
INTRODUCTION

_The Kite Runner_ by Khaled Hosseini was published in 2003. Initially published by Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin, _The Kite Runner_ was said to be the first novel written in English by an Afghan writer, and the book appeared on many book club reading lists. The novel is set in Afghanistan from the late 1970s to 1981 and the start of the Soviet occupation, then in the Afghan community in Fremont, California from the 1980s to the early 2000s, and finally in contemporary Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. _The Kite Runner_ is the story of strained family relationships between a father and a son, and between two brothers, how they deal with guilt and forgiveness, and how they weather the political and social transformations of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001. _The Kite Runner_ opens in 2001.

The adult narrator, Amir, lives in San Francisco and is contemplating his past, thinking about a boyhood friend whom he has betrayed. The action of the story then moves backward in time to the narrator's early life in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he is the only child of a privileged merchant. Amir's closest friend is his playmate and servant Hassan, a poor illiterate boy who is a member of the Hazara ethnic minority. _The Kite Runner_, a coming-of-age novel, deals with the themes of identity, loyalty, courage, and deception. As the protagonist Amir grows to adulthood, he must come to terms with his past wrongs and adjust to a new culture after leaving Afghanistan for the United States. The novel sets the interpersonal drama of the characters against the backdrop of the modern history of Afghanistan, sketching the political and economic toll of the instability of various regimes in Afghanistan; from the end of the monarchy to the Soviet-backed government of the 1980s to the fundamentalist Taliban government of the 1990s. The action closes soon after the fall of the Taliban and alludes to the rise of Hamid Karzai as leader of a new Afghan government in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001.

STORYLINE OF THE NOVEL

_The Kite Runner_ tells the story of Amir, an Afghan man living in San Francisco. He receives a call from an old friend of his father's, living in Pakistan, which brings back bittersweet memories of his childhood in Kabul, Afghanistan. Amir tells of his idyllic childhood in Kabul, where his father enjoyed much financial success and prestige. Amir and his father provide housing for their servants, Ali and his son, Hassan. Social class separates the two boys from true friendship. However, they share much of their time in boyhood. Hassan respects and reveres Amir, even protects him from neighborhood bullies. In Amir's twelfth year, he wins the neighborhood kite-fighting tournament, which, he prays, will earn his father's respect. All of Amir's childhood, he feels his father wishes for a more manly son. For the tournament, Hassan acts as Amir's helper, holding the spool as Amir works the strings and tries to cut the strings of his opponents' kites. When Amir finally cuts the last kite, Hassan runs it down, as promised. When Hassan
fails to return by dusk, Amir looks for the other boy. He finds a group of bullies taunting Hassan once again. They over take him easily. Assef, the leader of the group, rapes Hassan as Amir watches, horror-stricken, from his hiding place. He runs part way home and pretends to see Hassan for the first time when he emerges from the alley with the kite. Amir keeps the crime to himself and tries to bask in Baba, his father's, attention. However, guilt plagues him for years and ruins his relationship with Hassan. He finally makes it look like Hassan stole his birthday money. Ali decides he and his son will leave. Baba weeps as they drive away. Soon, political unrest drives Amir and Baba from Kabul.

They eventually make their way to America, where the previously wealthy Baba becomes a gas station attendant. Amir graduates from high school and enrolls in junior college. He falls in love with Soraya, another Afghan, and they marry just one month before Baba dies of lung cancer. The call from Rahim Khan, Baba's friend and business partner in Kabul, brings memories and a promise of absolution. Amir flies to Pakistan to see the ailing man. He tells Amir the story of Hassan coming to live with him in Kabul, of Hassan's wife and son, Sohab. The Taliban killed Hassan in the street months before Amir's arrival in Pakistan. Further, Rahim Khan admits that Baba fathered Hassan, making him Amir's half-brother. Such news jolts Amir.

He finally decides that he will try to rescue Sohab from the orphanage in Afghanistan. The trip to Afghanistan proves fateful. Amir learns that Assef, now powerful within the Taliban, bought Sohab. He challenges Amir to a fight to the death. Assef nearly beats Amir to death before Sohab hits him with his slingshot, as his father always threatened to do. They escape to Pakistan. Eventually, they find themselves in Islamabad, where an American Embassy official tells Amir how hopeless Sohab's adoption is. Yet, relatives of Soraya in INS, Immigrations and Naturalization Services, pull strings. Before Amir can tell Sohab, however, the boy becomes despondent and tries to take his own life. For days, he recovers in the ICU. Eventually, he flies to America with Amir. There, Soraya treats him like the child they could never have. Yet, Sohab lives in silence. Finally, at a New Year's party of area Afghan's, Amir flies a kite with Sohab and sees a hint of a smile. He cuts a competitor's kite and runs it down, offering the same promise Hassan did twenty-six years before.

**MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL**

Ali
Hassan’s father. Ali is a Hazara whom Baba’s father took in when his parents were killed. He grew up alongside Baba just as Hassan did alongside Amir. Ali has a crippled leg and paralysis in his lower face muscles and the neighborhood children ridicule him. He is as devoted and loyal as his son. Ali is killed by a land mine when Hassan is already grown.

Amir
The story's narrator and protagonist. He is an Afghan man who had a privileged childhood in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood of Kabul. The defining event in his life is his betrayal of his closest friend, Hassan. Amir lives in San Francisco from the age of eighteen. He returns to Afghanistan at the age of thirty-eight and ends up adopting Hassan's orphaned son, Sohrab.

Assef
A sociopath who worships Hitler. As a child, he is the neighborhood bully who rapes Hassan. As an adult, he is a Taliban official who delights in killing people. He keeps Sohrab as a sex slave until Amir comes to rescue him. After he beats Amir nearly to death, Assef loses an eye to Sohrab's slingshot. It is possible that Hosseini based the character of Assef on the reclusive one-eyed Taliban leader, Mullah Omar.

Baba
Amir's father. He is a wealthy and well-respected man with a dark secret; he had an affair with Ali's wife and Hassan is his illegitimate son. Baba wishes Amir were braver and stronger and that he could openly express his love for Hassan. Baba dies of terminal cancer in San Francisco shortly after Amir's wedding.

Farid
The Afghan man who drives Amir from Peshawar to Kabul and ends up helping him throughout his journey. He was injured fighting against the Soviets and is fiercely proud of his loyalty to Afghanistan. He saves Amir by taking him to a hospital in Pakistan.

General Taheri
Soraya's father. He is a former general who prefers collecting welfare to lowering himself to a blue collar job. He waits every day to be called back to Afghanistan.
**Hassan**
Amir's most loyal and devoted servant, who is born with a clept lip. He and Amir were nursed by the same woman and, unbeknownst to them both, they are half-brothers. Hassan is illiterate but smart and stands up for others. He is also the best kite runner in Kabul. He dies at the hands of the Taliban, defending Baba's house from takeover.

**Khanum Taheri**
Soraya's mother. She is a kind woman who likes to sing, although her husband does not let her. She became a hypochondriac after suffering a stroke and loves Amir all the more for listening to her describe her ailments.

**Omar Faisal**
A lawyer who counsels Amir that his best chance is to place Sohrab in an orphanage temporarily. He was raised in America but speaks perfect Farsi.

**Rahim Khan**
Baba's closest friend and Amir and Hassan's confidant. He has an uncanny way of knowing what people are thinking and how to speak to them. He is one of the few people who knows Hassan's real identity and about his rape. He encourages Amir to be a writer by giving him a notebook and it is he who summons Amir back to Afghanistan to atone for his and Baba's sins.

**Raymond Andrews**
The official at the American Embassy who urges Amir to give up trying to rescue Sohrab. Amir thinks he is cruel and does not understand wanting a child until the secretary tells him that Raymond Andrews's daughter committed suicide.

**Sanaubar**
Hassan's mother. She was Ali's notoriously beautiful first cousin and second wife, who ran off with a troupe of dancers. She refused to even hold Hassan when he was born. Years later, she returns to Wazir Akbar Khan to beg forgiveness from Hassan and ends up helping raise Sohrab. She dies peacefully when he is four.

**Sofia Akrami**
Amir's mother, who died in childbirth. She was a professor of literature at the university and her books inspire Amir to become a writer.

**Sohrab**
Hassan and Farzana's son. After his parents are murdered, he stays in an orphanage in Karteh-Seh. Then he is a sex slave to Assef until Amir rescues him. Sohrab tries to commit suicide after Amir tells him he may have to stay in an orphanage again. Eventually, Amir and Soraya bring him to America and adopt him.

**Soraya**
Amir's wife. She shamed her family as a young woman by running off with a man. She takes care of Baba when he is ill and eagerly accepts Sohrab into her family.

**Wahid**
Farid's brother. When Amir stays at his house, Wahid is kind to him and does not judge him for being American. He calls Amir "a true Afghan."

**THEMES IN THE NOVEL**

**Kites**
One can tell kites are central to the novel just by reading its title, The Kite Runner. On a plot level, the grand kite tournament of 1975 sets a circle of betrayal and redemption into motion, around which the story revolves. After Hassan gets raped while running his kite, Amir cannot separate kite fighting and running from his own betrayal and cowardice. Therefore, even after all of his injuries and trials on Sohrab's behalf, it is the act of kite running that finally makes him feel redeemed. Beyond their significance to the plot, kites have multiple layers of symbolism in the story. One of these layers involves the class difference between Amir and Hassan, which largely dictates and limits their relationship. In kite fighting, one boy controls the kite while the other assists by feeding the string. Just as Hassan makes Amir's breakfast, folds his clothes, and cleans his room, so does he cater to Amir in kite tournaments. Even though Hassan shares in the excitement of kite fighting, he does not actually have control over the kite. Hassan may help the kite "lift-and-dive," but Amir is the one who claims a victory. Hassan may catch a cherished rival kite and hold it in his arms, but always to bring it back to Amir, to whom it then belongs. His joy is vicarious, just like his experience of wealth and privilege while living in Baba's
household. In order to free himself of selfishness and cowardice, Amir must go from being merely a kite fighter—someone who seeks glory—to a kite runner, someone who genuinely does things for others.

The activity of kite fighting is violent by nature. The kites battle and so too do the children flying them. The string, which is covered in ground glass, carves deep gashes into the fliers' hands as they try to cut each other down, and once kites fall out of the sky, the kite runners retrieve them with the same furious determination as, say, a hunting dog does a slain bird. In its violence, kite fighting represents the conflicts that rage Afghanistan nearly throughout the course of the novel. When Hosseini paints us a picture of hundreds of kites trying haphazardly and with great determination to cut each other down, he shows us also the warring factions of Afghanistan overthrowing one another. At the same time kite fighting is violent, the mere act of kite flying is innocent and speaks of freedom. Amir and Hassan do not have control over the differences between them; in fact, they are both the victims of a lie, and their relationship would have been different had they known they were brothers. Yet despite their differences and the symbolism of their respective kite-fighting roles, flying kites is an activity that brings the boys together. For a moment, they are part of a team. For many years, Amir feels as though he and Hassan are adversaries for Baba's love. After the rape, Hassan's very existence infuriates Amir because it reminds him of his cowardice. Despite all this, when the boys fly kites together, they are on the same team. They are more like brothers then than perhaps any other time, because the activity is somewhat mutual. It allows them to momentarily escape their differences and enjoy a shared sense of exhilaration and freedom. The cover of *The Kite Runner* shows a kite flying very high over Kabul. This image can be seen to represent Amir and Hassan's shared sense of freedom, one that takes them away from life's realities until the kite is grounded again.

**Discrimination**

*The Kite Runner* tackles the issue of ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan with an example of the relationship between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Baba's father sets an example for him of being kind to Hazara people, even though they are historically demeaned and persecuted. He could have easily sent Ali to an orphanage after his parents' death, but chose to raise him in his household. Baba does the same with Hassan, although this is complicated by the fact that Hassan is actually his son. Even in Baba's house, the house of best intentions, the class barrier between the Pashtuns and Hazaras endures. Ali is as dear to Baba as a brother; he calls him "family." But Ali still lives in a hut and sleeps on a mattress on the floor. He tends the garden, cooks, and cleans up after Baba, and raises Hassan to do the same. So strong is Hassan's identity as a servant that even as an adult, when Baba is gone, he has no sense of entitlement.
He insists on staying in the hut and doing housework. When Hassan dies defending Baba's house, he does so not because he feels it belongs to him, but because he is being loyal to Baba and Amir.

In Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, discrimination is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. On the one hand, the Taliban do not seem to care whom they are beating, torturing, or executing. Children like Sohrab and grandmothers like Sanaubar are all susceptible to the Taliban's cruelty. In this way, the Talibs discriminate against everyone but themselves. As Amir notices, Assef forces Sohrab to dance to music for his enjoyment dancing and listening to music have long been banned. Amir thinks, "I guessed music wasn't sinful as long as it played to Taliban ears." On another level, the Taliban discriminate specifically against the Hazara people. They massacre the Hazaras not only in Mazar-i-Sharif, but in the region of Hazarajat and nearly anywhere else they can find them. Assef and his fellows do not see the Hazaras' lives as worthwhile; they barely see them as human. Assef tells Amir, "Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage." Like his idol, Hitler, he feels entitled to killing those he deems unworthy of living in his land. He even relishes the term "ethnic cleansing" because it goes so well with his garbage metaphor. Hosseini has mentioned in interviews that his focus on discrimination in The Kite Runner angers some Afghans, who feel it is inappropriate. Like Baba, many people do not mention the Hazaras' history of persecution. Perhaps these people are so uncomfortable with this topic because by having Assef appear in pre-Taliban times and emerge as a leading Talib, Hosseini shows that the Taliban's persecution of the Hazaras and other Shiites is not new, but a greatly intensified outgrowth of long-held discrimination.

**Sin and Redemption**

In The Kite Runner, redemption is so important because sin is so enduring. Amir opens the story by telling us not about how exactly he sinned, but about sin's endurance: "... It's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out." Hosseini uses structure to emphasize the themes of sin and redemption. Because Amir tells the story in retrospect, every memory, even the blissful ones of his childhood before the rape, are tainted with it. If the timeline of the novel was strictly chronological, we would not have the power of hindsight. Hosseini uses the first chapter almost like a thesis for the novel. As Amir retells the story of his life, he weighs each event against his sin, his betrayal of Hassan. As we learn towards the novel's end, Amir is not the only character who needs redemption, Assef notwithstanding. Until Rahim Khan reveals Baba's secret, Amir thinks he is the only sinner among his family and friends. Even before Amir betrays him, Hassan makes him feel
guilty simply by being such a righteous person. Amir is constantly trying to measure up to Baba, because he does not realize that Baba is so hard on him because of his guilt over his own sin.

One Amir finds out about Baba's sin, he feels as though his entire life has been a cycle of betrayal, even before he betrayed Hassan. But having a taste of betrayal himself does little towards redeeming Amir. In Ghazi Stadium, the Taliban skews the words of Muhammad in order to justify murdering the alleged adulterers. The mullah announces that every person should have a punishment befitting his sin. Although he would not want to compare himself to the Taliban, Amir believes this in regards to his own sin. When he tries to get Hassan to pelt him with pomegranates, he is expressing his feeling that in order to be forgiven for hurting Hassan, Hassan must hurt him. When Assef almost kills Amir, he feels "healed," as though now that Assef has hurt him, he is redeemed. He even tells Farid that in the room with Assef, he "got what he deserved." In the end, Amir finds out that punishment is not what will redeem him from his sin. It is not even saving Sohrab. In order to atone for his sin and Baba's before him, Amir must erase the lines of discrimination he has lived with all his life by giving Sohrab an equal chance at success and happiness.

Soraya needs Amir to forgive her before she can marry him. In the same way, Rahim Khan needs Amir to forgive him for keeping Baba's secret before he dies. Rahim Khan, the story's unofficial wise man, is the one who truly understands how redemption occurs. He tells Amir in his letter, "I know that in the end, God will forgive. He will forgive your father, me, and you too ... Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But most important, forgive yourself." Rahim Khan carries the novel's ultimate message about forgiveness. God is merciful; it is people who are not. Therefore, truly atoning for one's sins means coming to terms with them by oneself, without relying on a higher power. When Amir prays, he is still bound by fear and guilt; instead of wishing unselfishly for Sohrab to recover, he begs God not to leave "Sohrab's blood on his hands." When Amir manages to forgive himself in the very last moments of the novel, he redeems himself at last.

**Literacy and the Written Word**

In the novel, writing is both a dividing force and a uniting one. Amir's wish to be a writer separates him from Baba, who wants him to be athletic and equates his bookishness with weakness. In Amir's young life, his ability to read and write separates him from Hassan. Because Hassan is a Hazara and expected to remain a servant like Ali before him, no one makes sure he is literate. While Amir goes to school every day, Hassan stays behind and does his chores. On the one hand, Hassan's illiteracy brings him closer to
Amir. The boys spend countless hours together under the pomegranate tree, Amir reading stories to Hassan. When Amir begins to write stories, Hassan is his rapt audience. Yet Amir realizes that being literate gives him power over Hassan. He lords his advantage over the unsuspecting Hassan by making up stories while pretending to read and teasing Hassan for not knowing certain words. Only later does Hassan realize the power of literacy and its connection to social power. He makes sure that Sohrab can read and write and expresses his wish for Sohrab to be "someone important."

Despite the connection between literacy and discrimination, the written word is largely a unifying force in the novel. One thing that makes Amir admire Soraya even more is her story of how she taught an illiterate woman to read and write. That act of teaching unified Soraya and the woman; the telling of it brings her and Amir closer together. Traditionally, the power of the written word is located in its endurance beyond death. This rings true in the novel when Amir reads Hassan's letter, although as he reads it he does not yet know Hassan is dead. Additionally, remarkable about Hassan's letter is that it puts him on an equal level with Hassan; now that he is literate, written words are no longer a barrier between them. Rahim Khan's letter is the final one in the novel, and it is also the one containing the ultimate message about forgiveness. Hosseini gives extra emphasis to writing's importance by putting this central message in written form.

**Family Ties**

Family is extremely important in the story, especially because it takes place in Afghanistan. It is a nation where culture and tradition are of monumental importance, especially to the older generation. We see this when Baba and Amir are in America. Even though they are in a different country, Amir is expected to observe cultural tradition in courting Soraya. Not only must they go through *khastegari*, in order to get engaged, but they cannot be seen together in public before the wedding. One the one hand, everyone in Afghanistan is part of one family; as Baba says, "Take two Afghans who've never met, put them in a room for ten minutes, and they'll figure out how they're related." On the other hand, lineage is of the utmost importance. When Amir and Soraya are considering adopting a child, General Taheri explains that Afghans are not meant to disturb their family line with such a decision. He tells them that Baba's reputation was a big consideration in regards to their marriage and says, "Blood is a powerful thing ... And when you adopt, you don't know whose blood you're bringing into your house."

What General Taheri does not know is that for the very reason that family is so important to Afghans, Baba kept Hassan's identity secret to his grave. To him, denying Hassan his identity was preferable to confusing the relationship between Ali and himself and that between Amir and Hassan. Baba treats Ali
and Hassan as equally as he felt he could without destroying his and Ali's honor, but Baba knows that they are his family. Amir does not have this privilege and his ignorance makes him more irreverent towards Hassan, who is loyal as a brother to him anyway. Family is more important to Amir than he knows; his guilt over hurting Hassan is terrible when he thinks Hassan is just another person. Once he knows they are related, he is overcome with guilt, enough to put himself in danger and stand up for Sohrab. For much of his life, Amir feels as though his family is the cause of his problems. He thinks Baba blames him for his mother's death and spends much of his childhood tormented by trying to win a place in Baba's heart. Family is the reason why Amir fights to bring Sohrab home and, ultimately, the channel through which he redeems himself.

Violence

Even though Hosseini has stated that he wanted to remind people of a peaceful Afghanistan, he also does the service of revealing the suffering the nation has experienced in a quarter century of conflict. Violence pervades the novel, even in the seemingly innocuous activity of kite fighting. Not only is kite fighting violent because it is a kind of battle, but boys injure their hands when they participate. This fact suggests that Afghanistan has become a place where joy cannot exist separately from pain; Afghans' memories of their homeland are tainted with suffering. The entire novel centers around a single act of violence, Hassan's rape, and the sin Amir commits by pretending that violence did not occur. Symbolically, Hassan's rape is echoed by Sohrab's rape decades later and by Afghanistan's continual rape by war and terrorism.

Amir's life in America does involve suffering, especially regarding Baba's death. But Baba's death is peaceful. Because America is a haven from violence, the violence under the Taliban in Kabul is even more shocking and sobering. Amir gets a taste of violence when he and Baba are fleeing for Pakistan and Kamal's father commits suicide. However, nothing can prepare him for the extent of violence and suffering in Afghanistan. One of the most graphic accounts is of the stoning at Ghazi Stadium. Like the rapes of Hassan and Sohrab, the event symbolizes the devastation of Afghanistan as a whole, as Afghans once knew it. Another very violent event is Amir's fight with Assef. At the time, Amir's pain makes him feel happy and "healed"; it is as though by suffering, he is repaying Hassan for all the violence he suffered on Amir's behalf. Amir's split lip, though minor compared to his other injuries, is most significant because it represents this feeling of closeness to Hassan. Yet we learn that violence is not the answer to Amir's problems, nor does he understand just how deep its consequences run. When young Sohrab tries to kill himself, Amir sees that his nearly fatal injuries were nothing compared to the pain Sohrab and other
Afghans have suffered. Ultimately, he finds out that the only way to heal the violence done to Hassan and Sohrab is to forgive himself.

**Homeland and Nationality**

Because Amir immigrates to the United States when he is still growing up, the question of his national identity is especially complex. Baba sees America as a refuge and becomes enthralled, as Amir says, with "the idea of America." He identifies with American optimism and freedom of choice, and even hangs a framed picture of Ronald Reagan on the wall of their apartment. Up until his death, Baba is a guest in America; Afghanistan is undeniably the place where he can be himself. There, he was a successful and influential figure. In America, he must work at the gas station and suffer the humiliation of being a foreigner, as with the Nguyens. For young Amir, America is not only politically free, but more importantly, free of Hassan and memories of him. He uses the image of a river to describe the exhilaration and cleansing effect that being in America has on him. He opens his arms wide to America, even though he maintains Afghan traditions regarding courtship and writes a novel about Afghanistan. Because he comes into adulthood in America, Amir does not suffer along with his fellow Afghans. As he discovers, this makes all the difference in defining his national identity.

Amir's coming to Afghanistan should by all accounts be a homecoming, but Amir can never truly revisit his homeland; it no longer exists as he knew it. In the interim between Amir's flight from Kabul and his return, the Soviets, warring factions, and the Taliban have turned it from a culturally rich and bustling place into a ghost town of beggars among the rubble and hanging corpses. Amir can no longer be an Afghan because being an Afghan has become synonymous with having survived terror, if not much worse. According to Farid, however, Amir never had an Afghan identity to lose. He tells Amir that his privileged upbringing has made him a "tourist" in Afghanistan all his life. Amir himself tells Rahim Khan that he cannot go to Afghanistan because he has a wife, a home, and a life in America. Through these conversations, Hosseini asks what constitutes a homeland, a watan. If Farid is right, then Amir has no homeland. However, once Farid finds out why Amir has returned to Afghanistan, he changes his opinion of him. He seems to accept him as a friend, if not a countryman. According to the novel, then, one's homeland depends not only on one's emotional attachment to a place but one's tangible devotion to it. To make a place one's homeland, Hosseini seems to suggest, one must be willing not merely to dwell on nostalgic feelings but to put them into action—whether like Farid, by fighting in a trench, or like Amir, by trying to save someone from the homeland itself.
CONCLUSION

*The Kite Runner* deals with the country of Afghanistan from the 1970s to the year 2002. Like all places, Afghanistan has a long and complicated history, but it came to international attention only after the coup of 1973. The nation is located in Central Asia and is made up of thirty-four provinces. The country's capital is Kabul, which is also the capital of the northeast province of the same name. Afghanistan means "Land of Afghan," Afghan being a name the Pashtun majority used to describe themselves starting before the year 1000. It is bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and for a short distance, China.

From 1933-1973, Afghanistan was a monarchy ruled by King Zahir Shah. On July 17, 1973, when the king was on vacation, Mohammad Daoud Khan seized power. Mohammad Daoud Khan was Zahir Shah's cousin and a former Prime Minister of Afghanistan. The military coup was nearly bloodless, but as we see through Amir's story, it was still a frightening time for the people of Kabul who heard rioting and shooting in the streets. For six years, Mohammad Daoud Khan was President and Prime Minister of Afghanistan. Then, on April 27, 1978, he was violently overthrown by the PDPA, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Daoud was killed in the coup along with most of his family. Even though Afghanistan had long insisted on maintaining its independence from Russia, the PDPA was a Communist party and therefore held close ties to the Soviet Union.

The PDPA instituted many political and social reforms in Afghanistan, including abolishing religious and traditional customs. These reforms incensed groups of Afghans who believed in adherence to traditional and religious laws. These factions began to challenge the government so rigorously that in 1979, the Soviet Army entered Afghanistan, beginning an occupation that would last a decade. This is the historical point in *The Kite Runner* when Baba and Amir leave Afghanistan. Throughout the ten years of Soviet occupation, internal Muslim forces put up a resistance. Farid and his father are examples in *The Kite Runner* of these mujahedins or men engaged in war on the side of Islam. The United States was among the countries that supported the resistance, because of its own anti-Soviet policies. When the Soviet Troops finally withdrew in 1989, Afghanistan remained under PDPA for three more years. Then in 1992, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore Soviet support for the government, the mujahedin finally won Afghanistan and converted it to an Islamic State.
In the years following Soviet withdrawal, there was a great deal of infighting among rival militias, making everyday life in Afghanistan unsafe. In *The Kite Runner*, Rahim Khan describes the fear in Kabul during this time. The Taliban were a group of Pashtun supremacists who banded together and took almost complete control of the country. Despite their warm initial reception, they soon made life in Afghanistan dangerous again. Being Sunni fundamentalists supremacists, they systematically massacred Shiites including the Hazara people. They also enacted fundamentalist laws, most famously those banning music and dance, and those severely restricting women's rights. In *The Kite Runner*, we see how the Taliban used fear and violence to control the people of Afghanistan, for example at the frequent executions in Ghazi Stadium.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban. The end of *The Kite Runner* occurs in 2002, when a provisional government was in place. It was not until 2004 that the current president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, was elected. Today, there are countless Afghan refugees living in other parts of the world, just like Amir and his family. For those Afghans living in Afghanistan, life is still dangerous. In the South, conflict continues to rage on and the Taliban have managed to reemerge. According to Amnesty International's 2007 report, violence and human rights abuses are still a common reality in Afghanistan due to weak governance.

**Further Reading:**

- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333044090_Khaled_Hosseini's_The_Kite_Runner_A_Psychoanalytic_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333044090_Khaled_Hosseini's_The_Kite_Runner_A_Psychoanalytic_Analysis)