New Literatures in English

BBL 3211 (Unit 1-12/12)

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The Module Writer

Wan Roselezam bt. Wan Yahya obtained her B.A. English from Western Illinois University, Macomb, USA in 1985; her M.A. in TESL from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA in 1987; and her Ph.D in English Drama & Literature from the University of Leeds, U.K. in 1999. Now she is currently lecturing literature and drama courses in UPM.
UNIT 1

NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH: AN OVERVIEW

Content:

- The Study Texts
- Study Schedule
- An overview of the Course
- Assessment
- The Self-Assessment Tasks
- General Critical Works for New Literatures in English
THE STUDY TEXTS

These are the list of texts which consist of poems, short stories and drama from various countries all available in the anthology:


A. Malaysia and India

Poems:

Shirley Geok-lin Lim "Ah Mah" Malaysia (290)

Kamala Das "An Introduction” India (386)

Short Stories:

Bharati Mukherjee "Hindus" India (208)

R. K. Narayan "Mother and Son" India (215)

B. Africa

Poems:

Kofi Awoonor “Song of War” Ghana (364)

Ifeanyi Menkiti "Veterans Day” Nigeria (421)

Wole Soyinka “Telephone Conversation” Nigeria (452)

Mohamud S. Togane “Arfaye” Somalia (459)

Short Stories:
Chinua Achebe “Civil Peace” Nigeria (147)

C. Canada
Poems:
Margaret Atwood "Game After Supper" Canada (300)

Short Stories:
Alice Munro “The Found Boat” Canada (44)

D. The Caribbean
Poems:
Nancy Morejon “Central Park Some People (3P.M.)” Cuba (311)
Aime Cesaire “Spirals” Martinique (379)
Judith Ortiz Cofer “What the Gypsy Said to Her Children” Puerto Rico (381)
Claude McKay “Outcast” Jamaica (420)

Short Stories:
Jamaica Kincaid “Girl” Antigua (91)

E. African-American & Chinese American Minority

Short Stories:
Alice Walker “Roselily” African-American (91)
Amy Tan “Two Kinds” Chinese-American (125)
Drama:

David Henry Hwang “Family Devotions” Chinese-American (941)

STUDY SCHEDULE

First Face-to-Face Meeting
UNIT 1  New Literature in English: Overview
UNIT 2  Poems & Short Stories from Malaysia & India: I
UNIT 3  Poems & Short Stories from Malaysia & India: II
UNIT 4  Poems & Short Stories from Africa: I
UNIT 5  Poems & Short Stories from Africa: II
UNIT 6  Poems & Short Stories from Africa: III

Second Face-to-Face Meeting
UNIT 7  Poems & Short Stories from Canada
UNIT 8  Poems & Short Stories from The Caribbean: I
UNIT 9  Poems & Short Stories from The Caribbean: II
UNIT 10 Short Stories & Drama from African-American & Chinese-American Minority: I
UNIT 11 Short Stories & Drama from African-American & Chinese-American Minority: II
UNIT 12 Taking Examination
Final Examination

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

The study of New Literatures in English is concerned with colonial and postcolonial writing which emerged in former British colonies such as: parts of Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, islands in the South Pacific, and Sri Lanka. According to many theorists, the USA should also be included in the list but owing to its state of independence, which was won long before other colonies, and its current position of power, American
literature is not considered to be postcolonial. African-American literature, however, is regarded as postcolonial because of its African and European cultural origins, and because of its marginal status.

Since New literatures written in English cover so many nations with their distinct national/racial cultures, it is hardly possible to generalize about them, not to mention teaching them all in one course. These literatures, however, do have common concerns, their nations having all experienced imperialism and colonization, and their peoples, immigration and frequently more than once. Among the common concerns there are: influences of colonization, possibilities of decolonization and defining national identity, power relations (between the colonizer and the colonized, dominant group and minorities).

To do a focused survey of New Literatures in English, this course chooses literatures (short stories, poems and drama) from Malaysia, India, the African and Canadian continent, the Caribbean area (including Antigua, Martinique, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Jamaica), and those written by the African-American and Chinese-American writers.

Heavy reading will be required to avoid the superficial understanding of these literatures. You are also encouraged to bring in other relevant texts from popular culture of these areas.

**ASSESSMENT**

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<tr>
<td>Mid-Semester Exam</td>
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*Due during 2nd face-to-face meeting*

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS**

Please attempt all the “Self-Assessment Tasks” for each unit of the course. These have been designed to help you focus your mind on the key issues in each work.
GENERAL CRITICAL WORKS FOR NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Here are a few notable works that you might want to consult:


UNIT 2

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM MALAYSIA & INDIA: I

Content:
- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of:

1. Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s openness in her poetry to give voice and create courageous role model to all female readers;
2. meanings implicit in Kamala Das’ frank, bold, and controversial poem on female oppression.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Heritage, family and community in “Ah Ma”.
2. Female suffering and humiliation in “An Introduction”.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Poems to Read

1. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Ah Mah" (290).
2. Kamala Das, "An Introduction" India (386)

b. Shirley Lim as a poet

Shirley Geok-lin Lim is an award-winning writer of fiction, poetry, and criticism who strives to bring together, rather than separate, the multiplicities in the different threads of her cultural identity. Born in 1944 in Malacca, Malaysia, a small town on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, she endured a childhood powerfully shaped by deprivation, poverty, parental violence and abandonment. Abandoned by her mother, and growing up with five brothers in a culture that rarely recognized girls as individuals, she tried desperately to fit in. Lim described herself during this period as "a wild girl who ran with the boys and alone through the streets" (Among the White Moon Faces, 49).

This experience only seemed to toughen Lim. She possessed a "stubborn spirit" that she utilized in school, making her a leader as well as an outcast.
In an interview with Sook C. Kong of the Asian Lesbian Bisexual Alliance, Lim says, "Growing up when I did, there weren't many other recreational alternatives, and I had a pretty unhappy childhood. Reading was a huge solace, retreat, escape. I was a really obsessive reader. Somewhere along the line, I had a sense I should write about things I knew rather than read about things I didn't know. I wanted to write my own voice, my own community."

Finding her own voice meant coming to an understanding of her native Chinese-Malaysian familial culture vis-a-vis the conflicting values her Westernized parents modeled. She was scorned by teachers for her love of English over her "native" tongue and was looked down upon for wishing to pursue her love of English literature. Her early education was at a Catholic convent school under the British colonial education system. Lim then won a federal scholarship to the University of Malaya which she attended from 1964 to 1969, earning a BA with First Class Honors in English. In 1969, at the age of twenty-four, motivated by two prestigious fellowships, she entered graduate school at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, earning her Ph.D. in English and American Literature in 1973.

Poetry is Lim's driving passion. In terms of poetry, she says "That was my first form of literary expression and is the most primal for me." Her first poem was written and then published in the Malacca Times when she was ten. By the time she was eleven, she knew she wanted to be a poet. Her first book of poetry, Crossing the Peninsula and Other Poems, won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1980, just after the birth of Lim's first (and only) child, Gershom. Lim was the first woman and the first Asian to receive the award. With a provocative and intimate tone, Lim uses her poetry to reach into the past to make sense of the present. Thematically, questions of identity and transition, gender, race, and the complexities of relationships permeate Lim's poetry. Dreams and her childhood experiences often provide inspiration and source material.

Although Lim identifies herself as a poet, she is a cross-genre writer who has also published numerous scholarly essays, short stories, and her memoir, Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands (Feminist Press, 1996). In 1990, along with co-editors Mayumi Tsutakawa and Margarita Donnelly, she won the American Book Award for The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology. In 1982 she won an Asiaweek Short Story award for "Mr. Tang's Uncles." (Feminist Press, 1997).
Lim's writing has received considerable attention both in the United States and in Asia since the 1996 publication of her memoir. Readily apparent in Lim's prose writing are her roots as a poet. There is extreme attention to detail, making the memoir read much like a novel. She describes scenes from her past with vivid imagery. On page 10, for example, she describes "Cold water from a giant tap running down an open drain that is greenish slime under my naked feet."

Lim says that one of the "major thematics" to emerge from the memoir is the story of emigration from Asia to the U.S. As an Asian, she came to see the reality of the U.S. that had been glamorized before she came. In Malaysia she was an outsider for being an "Anglophile freak"; in the U.S. she was lonely in a society where she was treated with awkward stiffness and tentativeness. "There are many ways," she laments, "in which America tells you you don't belong" (Among the White Moon Faces, 199)

A simple, yet important element in Lim's writing is her profound honesty. She fearlessly recognizes the struggles she has endured, admitting her choices were not always easy or correct. Her work possesses a rare openness that makes her an accessible voice and courageous role model to all female readers, not just those of a similar heritage.

"Across the divisions of race and class (between women), a rare yet common ground is visible. We understand each other in devious ways: our physical desires and the shame we have been trained to feel over our bodies, our masked ambitions, the distances between our communities and our hungry selves, our need to be needed. (I find) a sensibility of support that grows when social gender is recognized as a shared experience" (Among the White Moon Faces, 157).

Currently working on a novel and new collection of poems, Lim continues to explore origin and identity. Her current research includes a book-length study of gender and nation identities in Asian American discourses.

Taken and Adapted From: http://voices.clarc.edu/authors/shirleylim.html

c. Kamala Das as a poet
In *My Story*, Kamala Das, a poet famous for her honesty, tells of intensely personal experiences including her growth into womanhood, her unsuccessful quest for love in and outside marriage, and her living in matriarchal rural South India after inheriting her ancestral home. While at home, the rich families try to kill her with magic because they fear that her writing will reveal their immorality in. [In what sense does Das create a paradigm for the way repressive societies fear women’s speaking, writing, and other self-defining forms of personal expression?] Like European women authors, Das seizes control of the society’s own cultural codes, particularly those formed by dominant religious ideologies. She uses, for example, the terrifying religious image of Kali, the goddess of war and desctruction, in her defiant reaction:

> I hung a picture of Kali on the wall of my balcony and adorned it daily with long strings of red flowers, resembling the intestines of a disembowelled human being. Anyone walking along the edge of my paddysfield a furlong away, could see the Goddess and the macabre splash or red. This gave the villagers a fright. [Kamala Das, *My Story* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1988), 201]

Das often thus uses traditional religious imagery to sustain and dignify herself. She claims to search for an incarnation of the god Krishna in her love affairs and worships the god when the real men turn out to have flaws. Once, calmly facing death before a potentially fatal heart operation, she pictures herself as the goddess Durga and she titles one of her chapters "I Was Carlo's Sita," in which she tells about one of her affairs. Das reaches into her own religious tradition to find support for her defiant individuality.

Taken and Adapted From:

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS**

Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s “Ah Ma”:
1. Answer all the three questions posed at the end of the poem on page 291. Discuss the tradition of ‘foot-binding’ in the Chinese tradition. How is this tradition seen as oppressive for women?
2. Does this poem has a feminist overture? If so/not, why and how?
3. Write a paraphrase of “Ah Ma” in about 100 words.

Kamala Das’s "An Introduction":

1. Describe the various facets of identity emphasized in the poem.
2. With whom is the persona in conflict? Discuss the issues of disagreement.
3. Examine the implications of: her having to choose a name and playing a role; and of her being a saint and a sinner.
4. Discuss the portrayal of men and the significance of the images used to describe them.
5. Analyze the ambiguity of her being herself and every woman at once.
6. Examine the tone of the poem: what lies at the core of her pain?

Discussion Question:

Examine the many issues pertaining to an Indian’s or Chinese woman’s identity, the criss-cross of: caste, class, education, religion, vocation, as well as marital status and motherhood.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS


UNIT 3

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM MALAYSIA & INDIA: II

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of:

1. Mukherjee’s depiction of class and caste in India
2. Narayan’s characterization of family relationships in an Indian family.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Caste and class in Bharati Mukherjee’s “Hindus”
2. Children and family in R. K. Narayan’s “Mother and Son”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Short Stories to Read

1. Bharati Mukherjee, “Hindus”, India (208)
2. R. K. Narayan, “Mother and Son”, India (215)

b. Mukherjee as a writer

Bharati Mukherjee was born on July 27, 1940 to wealthy parents, Sudhir Lal and Bina Mukherjee in Calcutta, India (Alam 1). She learned how to read and write by the age of three (Vignisson). In 1947, she moved to Britain with her family at the age of eight and lived in Europe for about three and a half years. By the age of ten, Mukherjee knew that she wanted to become a writer, and had written numerous short stories.

After getting her B.A from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and her M.A. in English and Ancient Indian Culture from the University of Baroda in 1961, she came to the United States of America (Alam 4). Having been awarded a scholarship from the University of Iowa, earned her M.F.A. in Creative Writing in 1963 and her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature in 1969 (Alam 5). While studying at the University of Iowa, she met and married a Canadian student from Harvard, Clark Blaise, on
September 19, 1963. The two writers met and, after a brief courtship, married within two weeks (Alam 7). Together, the two writers have produced two books along with their other independent works. Mukherjee's career a professor and her marriage to Blaise Clark has given her opportunities to teach all over the United States and Canada. Currently she is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

Mukherjee's works focus on the "phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates" as well as on Indian women and their struggle (Alam 7). Her own struggle with identity first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the United States has lead to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants (Alam 10).

Mukherjee's works correspond with biographer Fakrul Alam's catagORIZATION of Mukherjee's life into three phases. Her earlier works, such as the *The Tiger's Daughter* and parts of *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, are her attempts to find her identity in her Indian heritage.

"The Tiger's Daughter" is a story about a young girl named Tara who ventures back to India after many years of being away only to return to poverty and turmoil. This story parallels Mukherjee's own venture back to India with Clark Blaise in 1973 when she was deeply affected by the chaos and poverty of Indian and mistreatment of women in the name of tradition, "What is unforgivable is the lives that have been sacrificed to notions of propriety and obedience" (*Days and Nights*, 217). Her husband, however, became very intrigued by the magic of the myth and culture that surrounded every part of Bengal.; These differences of opinion, her shock and his awe, are seen in one of their joint publications, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*.

The second phase of her writing, according to Alam, encompasses works such as *Wife*, the short stories in *Darkness*, an essay entitled "An Invisible Woman," and *The Sorrow and the Terror*, a joint effort with her husband. These works originate in Mukherjee's own experience of racism in Canada, where despite being a tenured professor, she felt humiliated and on the edge of being a "housebound, fearful, affrieved, obsessive, and unforgiving queen of bitterness" (Mukherjee, qtd. in Alam 10).

After moving back to the United States, she wrote about her personal
experiences. One of her short stories entitled "Isolated Incidents" explores the biased Canadian view towards immigrants that she encountered, as well as how government agencies handled assaults on particular races. Another short story titled "The Tenant" continues to reflect on her focus on immigrant Indian women and their mistreatment. The story is about a divorced Indian woman studying in the States and her experiences with interracial relationships. One quotation from the story hints at Mukherjee's views of Indian men as being too preoccupied to truly care for their wives and children. "All Indian men are wife beaters,' Maya [the narrator] says. She means it and doesn't mean it."

In Wife, Mukherjee writes about a woman named Dimple who has been surpressed by such men and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife, but out of fear and personal instability, she murders her husband and eventually commits suicide. The stories in Darkness further endeavor to tell similar stories of immigrants and women.

In her third phase, Mukherjee is described as having accepted being "an immigrant, living in a continent of immigrants" (M. qtd in Alam 9). She describes herself as American and not the the hyphenated Indian-American title:

I maintain that I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I'm ashamed of my past, not because I'm betraying or distorting my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived here, and I write about the people who are immigrants going through the process of making a home here... I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation. That is very important. I am saying that the luxury of being a U.S. citizen for me is that can define myself in terms of things like my politics, my sexual orientation or my education. My affiliation with readers should be on the basis of what they want to read, not in terms of my ethnicity or my race. (Mukherjee qtd. in Basbanes)

Mukherjee continues writing about the immigrant experience in most of the stories in The Middle Man and Other Stories, a collection of short stories which won her the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Fiction, Jasmine, and essays. These stories explore the meeting of East and West through immigrant experiences in the U.S. and Canada along with further describing the idea of the great melting pot of culture in the United States.
Jasmine develops this idea of the mixing of the East and West with a story telling of a young Hindu woman who leaves India for the U.S. after her husband's murder, only to be raped and eventually returned to the position of a caregiver through a series of jobs (Alam 100). The unity between the First and Third worlds is shown to be in the treatment of women as subordinate in both countries.

Her latest works include The Holder of the World, published in 1993, and Leave It to Me, published in 1997. The Holder of the World is a beautifully written story about Hannah Easton, a woman born in Massachusetts who travels to India. She becomes involved with a few Indian lovers and eventually a king who gives her a diamond know as the Emperor's Tear. (Alam 120). The story is told through the detective searching for the diamond and Hannah's viewpoint. Mukherjee's focus continues to be on immigrant women and their freedom from relationships to become individuals. She also uses the female characters to explore the spatiotemporal (Massachusetts to India) connection between different cultures. In Leave It to Me, Mukherjee tells the story of a young woman sociopath named Debby DiMartino, who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents (described as a murderer and a flowerchild). The novel also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main characer in her quest for revenge. Candia McWilliam of The London Review of Books describes Mukherjee appropriately as "A writer both tough and voluptuous" in her works.

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Mukherjee.html

c. R.K. Narayan as a writer

Renowned English novelist of international fame, R. K. Narayan was born in Madras in 1906. He had his initial education in Madras (Chennai) and later at the Maharaja's College in Mysore. He was living in Mysore, the place which had maximum influence on him and reflected in his novels, till
recently. Presently, he is living in Madras. Dr. Narayan has travelled extensively. Most of his works, starting from his first novel, 'Swami and His Friends' (1935) is set in the fictional town of Malgudi. His novels reflect the Indian conditions and life and have a unique identity of their own. Malgudi comes to life in his novel, leaving a feeling that the reader is a part of Dr Narayan's fictional place.

Narayan started his career as a journalist in Mysore and later took to writing of novels. He has published numerous novels including 'The Guide' which was made into a film. His five collections of short stories are A Horse and Two Goats, An Astrologer's Day, Lawley Road, Malgudi Days, and The Grandmother's Tale. My Dateless Diary and The Emerald Route are two of his travelogues. Besides, Narayan has produced four collections of essays - Next Sunday, Reluctant Guru, A Writer's Nightmare, and A Story-Teller's World - and a memoir (My Days), and translations of Indian epics and myths like The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, and Gods, Demons and Others.

The Royal Society of Literature has honoured Dr. Narayan with the A.C. Benson award in 1980. He is an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. The Mysore University has conferred on him an honorary doctorate recognising his contribution to Indian English literature. The Central Sahitya Academy has conferred its award on Dr. Narayan in 1958 for his novel, The Guide.

Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Aiyar Naranayanaswamy, who in his early years signed his name as R. K. Narayan, shortened his name as R.K. Narayan at the time of the publication of 'Swami and His Friends' on Graham Greene's suggestion, a close literary colleague of his.

Taken and Adapted From:

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Bharati Mukherjee's "Hindus":

Answer all the four questions posed at the end of the story on page 214.
Explain in detail the issue of class and caste in this short story.
R. K. Narayan's "Mother and Son":

Answer all the three questions posed at the end of the story on page 217. Explain how arranged marriage may/may not be successful in this story.

Discussion Questions:

1. Research the development of caste system and its practice in modern India. Examine how it operates with regard to any one institution, such as marriage, education, politics, or religious practices in a specific community.

2. Comment on the dilemma posed by the demands of traditionalism and modernity in India and its portrayal in the work of any major author.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS

UNIT 4

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM AFRICA: I

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of: Awoonor’s and Menkiti’s attitudes towards war and peace in their poems.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Colonial experience in Kofi Awoonor “Song of War”
2. War and peace in Ifeanyi Menkiti “Veterans Day”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Poems to Read

1. Kofi Awoonor “Song of War”, Ghana (364)
2. Ifeanyi Menkiti “Veterans Day”, Nigeria (421)

b. Awoonor as a writer

Kofi Awoonor (formerly George Awoonor-Williams) was born in Wheta, Ghana to Ewe parents. His grandmother was a dirge-singer, and much of his early work is modeled on this type of Ewe oral poetry. According to critic Derek Wright, the poetry "both drew on a personal family heirloom and opened up a channel into a broader African heritage." In Rediscovery (1964) and Petals of Blood (1971), Awoonor uses the common dirge motif of the "thwarted or painful return" to describe the experience of the Western-educated African looking back at his indigenous culture. His most famous poem from the first collection is "the Weaverbird." In it he uses the weaverbird, a notorious colonizer who destroys its host tree, as a metaphor for Western imperialism in Africa. He describes the bird's droppings as defiling the sacred places and homesteads. He also blames the Africans for indulging the creature.

Awoonor has written two novels. The first, This Earth, My Brother... (1971) is an experimental novel which he describes as a "prose poem." In it, Awoonor tells a story on two levels, each representing a distinct reality. The first level is a standard narrative which details a day in the life an attorney
named Amamu. On another level, it is a symbol-laden mystical journey filled with biblical and literary allusions. These portions of the text deal with the new nation of Ghana, which is represented by a baby on a dunghill. The dunghill is a source of both rot and renewal, and in this way represents the foundations upon which Ghana was built, according to Awoonor.

Awoonor was closely tied to the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. Shortly after Nkrumah was driven out by a coup in 1966, Awoonor went into exile. During the time he was abroad, he completed graduate and doctoral studies, receiving a Ph.D. in literature from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1972. His dissertation was later published as *The Breast of the Earth* (1975). He returned to Ghana in 1975. Soon thereafter, he was detained for his alleged involvement with an Ewe coup plot. *The House by the Sea* (1978), a book of poetry, recounts his jail time.

Awoonor has not written much lately, instead spending his time engaged in Ghananian political activities. Unfortunately, this emphasis seems to have diminished the quality in addition to the quantity of his literary output. His more recent work has been compared unfavorably to his early material. Derek Wright calls his most recent novel, *Comes the Voyager at Last* (1992), about an African-American's journey to Ghana, "flat and tired."

Taken and Adapted From: [http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/cm/africana/woonor.htm](http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/cm/africana/woonor.htm)

c. Menkiti as a writer

Ifeanyi Menkiti was born in Onitsha, Nigeria, and educated at Columbia University and Pomona College. Menkiti’s subtext in his poetry is often a recapitulation of African history. He is an English professor at Wellesley College.

Particularly traumatic historical events such as the fighting in the Congo and the Nigerian Civil War provide much of the motivation, and the focus, for the poetry of Ifeanyi Menkiti. His poetry, readily identifiable by a distinctive sardonic tone, provides a striking example of the process wherein the expression of disgust is transmuted into the biting thrust of satire. These are lines addressed to an African general:

Bombing in a time of war
to rid Biafra of rebel bugs
led by the arch-bug Ojukwu
you killed a thousand children ...

The single line stands out. The accusation is clear: you are a murderer! However, the poet does not rest with that accusation. Instead, in the following stanza, he constructs what amounts to a mock apologetic:

but you really didn’t mean to do so
you only intended to rid
the children of rebel bugs
led by the arch-bug Ojukwu ...

Then, widening and concluding his indictment, the poet lashes out at "the great white fathers/who love us their little black children", those fathers who have provided the bombs and expertise "for us to kill ourselves." The use of the word love, in such a context, points to the sarcastic nature of the general observation regarding neo-colonialist involvement in a civil war situation. The poet's token display of apology - "you really didn't mean ..." - is the measure not just of his anger but of his utter contempt. The urbane flow of Menkiti's language is, here, the artistic camouflage for the satiric attack.

Taken and Adapted From:

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Kofi Awoonor "Song of War":

1. What is the tone of the poem? What sort of attitude do you get from his verses?
2. What is the speaker’s attitude towards the 'white man'?
3. What aspects of colonial history are reflected in the poem?
4. Discuss the significance of the last stanza. On what note does the poem conclude: hope? Frustration? Anger?

Ifeanyi Menkiti "Veterans Day":

1. What is the speaker’s attitude towards war and peace?
2. What does “civilization’s monkey-mongering ways” refer to?
3. Who is responsible for war that takes place in his world? Who are protesting and who are being oppressed?

Discussion Question:

Examine carefully the work of Kofi Awoonor to reconstruct the colonial experience in Nigeria.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS

UNIT 5

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM AFRICA: II

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of the issues of racial discrimination in Soyinka’s work and the importance of cultural identity in Togane’s poem.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Issues of colour and racism in “Telephone Conversation”.
2. Cultural identity in “Arfae”.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Poems to Read

1. Wole Soyinka, “Telephone Conversation”, Nigeria

b. Soyinka as a writer

Wole Soyinka (born Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka in 1934) is Africa’s most distinguished playwright, winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. A Yoruba, he studied first at the University College of Ibadan, then at Leeds University in England, where he came under the influence of the brilliant Shakespeare scholar G. Wilson Knight. The fifties were a period of great experimentation in the theater, both in France and England, and Soyinka was involved with various productions in Great Britain before returning to Nigeria, having been commissioned to write a play to celebrate that nation's independence in 1960 (A Dance of the Forests). It was a lyrical blend of Western experimentalism and African folk tradition, reflecting a highly original approach to drama. He has always emphasized his African roots, dubbing his early theater troupe "Masks," to acknowledge the role Yoruba pageantry has played in his work.

From the beginning he was a political figure, during the Nigerian Civil War he was not sufficiently anti-Biafran to suit the government and was put into solitary confinement for two years, being released only after an intense international campaign. This experience is movingly recounted in his book, A Man Died. He has written many plays, both for the theater
and for radio production, poetry, and prose fiction. He was granted the
Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. His political stands have earned him--
like most other prominent Nigerian writers--exile from his homeland.

He is also a vigorous critic of contemporary literature and has engaged in
heated debates with other Africans who have accused him of writing in an
obscure idiom that owes more to European traditions than Nigerian ones.
In turn, he has argued against the Négritude movement, stating that "The
Tiger does not boast of his tigritude." A passionate attachment to his
Yoruba roots combined with a fearless experimentalism has continued to
make him a controversial figure. Much of his later writing has been satire
directed against corrupt African leaders such as Bokassa and Amin,
whose predecessors in Nigeria were targets of such plays as Madmen and
Specialists. In 1973 Soyinka wrote a much more serious sequel to The
Trials of Brother Jero entitled Jero's Metamorphosis which objected to the
extreme measures taken by the Nigerian government against criminals.

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/anglophone/soyinka.html

c. Togane's biography in the author's own words

I was born in the cosmopolitan city of Mogadishu in 1947.
I lived in Mogadishu, my kingdom by the sea, until I left for the United
States in 1965. However, I had also lived three years
(from 1959 to 1963) in the village of Mahadday Wayn by the croc-
rippling Shabelle River with the Wesselhoefts,
at the Mennonite boys boarding school they ran.
The three happiest years of my life! Amidst the crocs
and the hippos and the snakes and the monkeys
and the Somali Bush people of Mahadday Wayn,
I was right in my element, in the holy Somali bush!

The tyranny and the terror of Afwayne and his version
of the Tontons Macoute eventually drove me to this
Arctic region of the world. But Allah gave me Madeleine
and Montreal as compensation! Montreal is now home.
I have lived for many years in Montreal than in Mad Mog
where I was born. After some thirty odd winters,
I now consider myself to be un Québécois de souche,
one of the hybrid birds Salman Rushdie talks about
and writes about: half-Cannuck, half-Somali bushman, half-Mennonite,
half-Moslem; half-genius, half-genie!
The Bottle and the Bushman, my first poetry collection, was engendered and midwifed by Concordia University’s Henry Beissel whose poetry workshop I attended in 1980. It has taken me this length of time to complete This Devil’s Concoction of Clans because, as James Joyce said, it is difficult to beat silence, cunning, and exile! I’d call this a winning combination, a most effective trinity!

If I had my wish, I would spend the six months of the year when it is snowing here, basking at the Lido Beach of Mog, working on my tan! For the other six months of course, I would be right here in my home in Montréal! I have no doubt that soon, very soon, the good Lord will grant me this wish as a blessing — a baksheesh!

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.progression.net/~prma1753/ZapTogoBook.html

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Wole Soyinka’s “Telephone Conversation”:

1. What is the speaker looking for in the poem? To whom is the speaker addressing his/her remarks?
2. What would be a probable race of the landlady and what kind of society is she living in?
3. What words are used to describe the colour of the various parts of the African skin/body? Would the landlady be faced with ‘colour’ discrimination too if she were to be the one looking for a place to rent?

Mohamud S. Togane’s “Arfaye”:

1. Who is the character Arfaye? How important is a nickname to a Somali? What kind of person is Arfaye?
2. What is he doing in the city of Mogadishu?
3. What attracts Arfaye’s attention towards the end the poem?
Discussion Question:

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's "Policy Racial Slurs and Harassment and Racial Jokes" document, the term RACE includes: race, ancestry, colour and ethnic origin. In some circumstances, citizenship, place of origin, creed (religion), and may also include language, accent and dress which may also be linked to race or place of origin. To combat racism, your challenges are: to recognize racist attitudes and behaviours; recognize attitudes and behaviours that encourage racism; unlearn racism; unite against racism; and, eliminate racism.

Find out if racism is alive in your community. It can be blatant, or hidden. and is often denied. Is racism a learned behavior?

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS

UNIT 6

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM AFRICA: III

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of Achebe’s views of civil peace in his work; and Gordimer’s portrayal of the social condition in South Africa in her fiction.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Social condition after Civil War in Nigeria in “Civil Peace”.

2. Exploitation of the South African natives in the eyes of the colonialist’s race in “The Train from Rhodesia”.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Short Stories to Read

1. Chinua Achebe “Civil Peace”, Nigeria (968)
2. Nadine Gordimer “The Train from Rhodesia”, South Africa (895)

b. Achebe as a writer

Prominent Igbo (Ibo) writer, famous for his novels describing the effects of Western customs and values on traditional African society. Achebe’s satire and his keen ear for spoken language have made him one of the most highly esteemed African writers in English. In 1990 Achebe was paralyzed from the waist down in a serious car accident.

"I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them" (from Morning Yet on Creation Day, 1975)

Chinua Achebe was born in Ogidi, Nigeria as the son of a teacher in a missionary school. His parents, though they installed in him many of the values of their traditional Igbo culture, were devout evangelical Protestants and christened him Albert after Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. In 1944 Achebe attended Government College in
Umuahia. He was also educated at the University College of Ibadan, where he studied Anglo-Saxon, history and theology. At the university, Achebe rejected his British name and took his indigenous name Chinua. In 1953 he graduated with a BA. Before joining the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos in 1954, he travelled in Africa and America, and worked for a short time as a teacher. In the 1960s he was the director of External Services in charge of the Voice of Nigeria.

"But all that is going to change. In ten years things will be quite different from what they are now."
The old man shook his head sadly but said no more. Obi repeated his points. What made an Osu different from other men and women? Nothing but the ignorance of their forefathers. Why should they, who had seen the light of the Gospel, remain in that ignorance?"
(from No Longer at Ease, 1960)

During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70) he was in the Biafran government service, and then taught at US and Nigerian universities. In 1967 he cofounded a publishing company at Enugu with the poet Christopher Ogbujo. Later he was appointed research fellow at the University of Nigeria, and then he became a professor of English, retiring in 1981. Achebe has been a professor emeritus since 1985. Since 1971 Achebe has edited Okike, the leading journal of Nigerian new writing. He has held post as a Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he met James Baldwin, also a faculty member, Professor of African studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, and Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Anamba State University of Technology, Enugu. In 1990s he has been a faculty member at Bard College, a liberal arts school, where he has taught literature to undergraduates.

"If we leave our gods and follow your god," asked another man, "who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?"
"Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm," replied the white man. "They are pieces of wood and stone."
When this was interpreted to the men of Mbanta they broke into derisive laughter. These men must be mad, they said to themselves. How else could they say that Ani and Amadiora were harmless? And Idemili and Ogbugwu too? And some
them began to go away."
(from Things Fall Apart, 1958)

Achebe's first novel, **THINGS FALL APART**, appeared in 1958. The story of a traditional village "big man," Okonkwo, and his downfall has been translated into some 50 languages. It was followed two years later by **NO LONGER AT EASE** and **ARROW OF GOD** (1964), which concerned traditional Igbo life as it clashes with colonial powers in the form of missionaries and colonial government. Among his later works is **ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH** (1987), a polyvocal text with multiple narrators. The story is set in an imaginary West African state. Sam, a Sandhurst-trained military officer, has become President. Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi, his friends, die when resisting brutal abuse of power. A military coup eliminates Sam and Beatrice Okah, Chris's London-educated girl friend, is entrusted with her community of women to return the political sanity.

Achebe has written collections of short stories, poetry, and several books for juvenile readers. His essays include **BEWARE, SOUL BROTHER** (1971) on his experiences during the Civil War. He has received a Margaret Wrong Prize, the New Statesman Jock Campbell Prize, and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. In 1983, upon the death of Mallan Aminu Kano, Achebe was elected the deputy national president of the People's Redemption Party. As the director of Heineman Educational Books in Nigeria, he has encouraged and published the work of dozens of African writers. He founded in 1984 the bilingual magazine **Uwa ndi Igbo**, a valuable source for Igbo studies.

"He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offense on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others." (from Things Fall Apart)

Achebe's own literary language is standard English blended with pidgin, Igbo vocabulary, proverbs, images and speech patterns. His skills as a storyteller Achebe shows in 'The Madman' in which the social customs of the Ibo-speaking people are strongly at present. In the richly layered narrative a nameless madman gets his revenge. Nwibe is a honored member of Ogbaru, a distant town, and plans to go to the market. Nwibe
has once whipped the madman out of his hut in a market and sent his children to throw stones at him. When Nwibe washes off the sweat of work by the river, the madman take his cloth. Nwibe runs naked after him, shouting 'Stop the madman.' The thief with the cloth disappears in the crowd, and Nwibe is taken to a medicine-man, but he has lost his social position. "For how could a man be the same again of whom witnesses from all the lands of Olu and Igbo have once reported that they saw today a fine, hefty man in his prime, stark naked, tearing through the crowds to answer the call of the market-place. Such a man is marked forever."

Taken and Adapted From: http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/achebe.htm

c. Gordimer as a writer

South African novelist and short-story writer, who received Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. Gordimer's works deal with the moral and psychological tensions of her racially divided home country. She was a founding member of Congress of South African Writers, and even at the height of the apartheid regime, she never considered going into exile.

"A line in a statute book has more authority than the claims of one man's love or another's. All claims of natural feeling are over-ridden alike by a line in a statute book that takes no account of humanness, that recognizes neither love nor respect nor jealousy nor rivalry nor compassion nor hate - nor any human attitude where there are black and white together. What Boaz felt towards Ann; what Gideon felt towards Ann, what Ann felt about Boaz, what she felt for Gideon - all this that was real and rooted in life was void before the clumsy words that reduced the delicacy and towering complexity of living to a race theory..." (from Occasion for Loving, 1963)

Nadine Gordimer was born into a well-off family in Springs, Transvaal, an East Rand mining town outside Johannesburg. It was the setting for Gordimer's first novel, THE LYING DAYS (1953). Her father was a Jewish jeweler originally from Latvia and her mother of British descent. From her early childhood Gordimer witnessed how the white minority increasingly weakened the rights of the black majority. Gordimer was
educated in a convent school and she spent a year at Witwaterstrand University, Johannesburg without taking a degree.

Often kept at home by a mother who imagined she had a weak heart, Gordimer began writing from the age of nine and her first story, 'Come Again Tomorrow', appeared in the children's section of the Johannesburg magazine *Forum* when she was only fourteen. By her twenties Gordimer had had stories published in many of the local magazines and in 1951 the *New Yorker* accepted a story, publishing her ever since.

From her first collection of short stories, **FACE TO FACE** (1949), which is not listed in some of her biographies, Gordimer has revealed the psychological consequences of a racially divided society. It was followed, by **THE SOFT VOICE OF THE SERPENT** (1952), and novel *The Lying Days* (1953), which was based largely on the author's own life. The story depicted a white girl, Helen, and her growing disaffection toward the narrow-mindedness of a small-town life. Other works in the 1950s and 1960s include **A WORLD OF STRANGERS** (1958), **OCCASION FOR LOVING** (1963), and **THE LATE BOURGEOIS WORLD** (1966). In these novels Gordimer studies the master-servant relations characteristic of South African life, spiritual and sexual paranoia of colonialism, and the shallow liberalism of her privileged white compatriots.

**Occasion for Loving** was concerned with the 'line in a statute book' - South Africa's cruel racial law. In the story an illicit love affair between a black man and a white woman ends bitterly. Ann Davis is married to a gentle Jew called Boaz Davis, a dedicated scholar who has travelled all over the country in search of African music. Gideon Shibalo, a talented painter, is black, he has a marriage and several affairs behind. The liberal Mrs Jessie Stillwell is a reluctant hostess to the law-breaking lovers. Boaz, the cuckold, is on the side of the struggling South African black majority, and Ann plays with two men's emotions.

"She looks at them all and cannot believe what she knows: that they, suddenly here in her house, will carry the AK 47s they only sing about, now, miming death as they sing. They will have a career of wiring explosives to the undersides of vehicles, they will go away and come back through the bush to dig holes not to plant trees to shade home, but to plat land mines. She can see they have been terribly harmed but cannot believe they could harm. They are wiping their fruit-sticky hands furtively palm against palm."

(from 'Comrades' in *Jump*, 1991)
Gordimer won early international recognition for her short stories and novels. *The Conservationist* (1974) juxtaposed the world of a wealthy white industrialist with the rituals and mythology of Zulus. *Burger's Daughter* (1979) was written during the aftermath of Soweto uprising. In the story a daughter analyzes her relationship to her father, a martyrs of the antiapartheid movement. *July's People* (1981) was a futuristic novel about a white family fleeing from war-torn Johannesburg into the country, where they seek refuge with their African servant in his village. Gordimer's early short story collections include *Six Feet of the Country* (1956), *Not for Publication* (1965) and *Livingstone's Companions* (1971). The historical context of the racial divided society has also been the fundamental basis of her short stories. In 'Oral History' from *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980) the village chief has chosen the side of the oppressors and after his village is destroyed he commits suicide. Gordimer examines coolly the actions of her protagonist, linking the tragic events in the long tradition of colonial policy. In the background of the story is the war of independence in Zimbabwe (1966-1980). Gordimer uses the mopane tree as a paradoxical symbol of life and death - the chief hangs himself in the mopane, the dead are buried in the mopane, and finally the tree becomes a means of consolidation."The women are to be seen carrying tins and grain panniers of mud up from the river. In talkative bands they squat and smear, raising huts again. They bring sheaves of reeds exceeding their own height, balanced like the cross-stroke of a majuscule T on their heads. The men's voices sound through the mopane as they choose and fell trees for the roof supports."

Taken and Adapted From: [http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/gordimer.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/gordimer.htm)

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS**

Chinua Achebe's "Civil Peace":

1. Answer all the three questions posed at the end of the short story (p. 968).
2. How important is the bicycle to Jonathan?
3. In the last paragraph Jonathan says of egg-rasher, "I count it as nothing." Do you think he was not angry with the thieves who took his egg-rasher by force or was he just pretending to be rational?
4. Characterize Jonathan. What do you think of him?
5. Would lasting peace ever be restored in Nigeria after the violent Civil War (1967-1970) if the government does not take effective measures to put a stop to the terrorists who are engaged in murder, looting, destruction and other acts of terror against the civilians?

Nadine Gordimer’s “The Train from Rhodesia”:

1. Answer the three questions posed at the end of the story (p. 898).
2. What do the train and the stationmaster symbolize?
3. Describe the social condition of South Africa as depicted by the writer.

Discussion Questions:

1. Investigate the extent of racial discrimination in Apartheid Africa. (The Anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa begins in 1948 and ends in 1994).
2. Read this essay written by a Nigerian student. What can you make out of the social and political condition of Nigeria?

“I was born in the Igbo ethnic group a year after the Nigerian civil war. The Igbos lost the war. At the end of the war a programme of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation was introduced. These programmes were observed in breach. Take reconciliation, that value of restoring relations, which has been broken or hurt, for peace to reign. Which is needed within every person torn by tensions, between individuals, communities, nations and in the international community.

A civilised manner of living and journeying together and a powerful tool in peace making. Today 30 years after the civil war, we are still not genuinely reconciled and we have cries of marginalisation and neglect everywhere. I live among the people of the Niger Delta who produce the oil wealth. Everyday these people are faced with the uncertainty of the future and the frustrations of the present. The people are mostly unemployed or not meaningfully employed. This condition makes them defensive and prone to violence at the least provocation. Their land produce the wealth, yet they are poor.”
RELATED CRITICAL WORKS

UNIT 7

POEM & SHORT STORY FROM AUSTRALIA & CANADA

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of:
the issue of displacement in Kevin Gilbert’s poem and the upbringing of
strict gender roles in rural Canada in Munro’s short story.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Displacement of the native Australian in “Kiacatoo”
2. Gender roles in rural Canada in “Boys and Girls”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Short stories to Read:

   1. Kevin Gilbert, “Kiacatoo”
   2. Alice Munro “Boys and Girls” (1003)

b. Kevin Gilbert as a writer:

Kevin Gilbert was born in Condobolin, New South Wales in 1933, of the
Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi peoples. He left school after fifth grade at age
fourteen, and worked in itinerant seasonal jobs. In 1957 Gilbert was
sentenced to life imprisonment after a domestic dispute in which his wife
was killed. During the fourteen years that he spent in some of the worst
jails in Australia he strove to educate himself, honing his artistic talents to
become a prominent poet, playwright, printmaker (Gilbert was Australia’s
first recognised Aboriginal printmaker) and photographer.

Gilbert wrote the play The Cherry Pickers in 1968 and first exhibited his
work in 1970 at the Arts Council Gallery, Sydney, in an exhibition
organised by the Australia Council. He was granted parole in 1971.
Gilbert was instrumental in the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent
Embassy opposite Old Parliament House, Canberra the following year,
and wrote Because a White Man’ll Never Do It in 1973. His book Living
Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert (1977) was awarded the National
Book Council Book Award in 1978.

Gilbert was Chairperson of the Treaty ‘88 campaign, which fought for the
establishment of a treaty enshrining Aboriginal rights and sovereignty. In
this capacity he also organised the touring photography exhibition Inside
Black Australia, in which his own work was included. In 1988 Gilbert was awarded the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Human Rights Award for Literature for his anthology of Aboriginal poetry, Inside Black Australia, which he returned; feeling he could not accept such an award while his people were denied human rights in their own land. His work was included in Narragunnawali at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space in 1989. In 1992 he received a Australian Artists Creative Fellowship from the Australia Council. Kevin Gilbert died in 1993. The Kevin Gilbert Memorial Trust was established in 1993 to further his aspirations.

Gilbert's work has been included posthumously in numerous exhibitions including the touring exhibition New Tracks - Old Land in 1993. In 1994 his work was also exhibited in Urban Focus: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art from the Urban Areas of Australia at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra and Tynbarhbourwaраку II, which was shown as part of the 5th Havana Biennial, Cuba that same year. In 1995 Gilbert's poetry Black from the Edge was awarded the RAKA award, and his children's book Me and Mary Kangaroo was shortlisted for the 1995 Australian Multicultural Award. He communicated a vision for the way forward: "only those who love the land and love justice will ultimately hold the land".

Kevin used his creative intelligence to cut through the layers of white denial that are the fabric of the foundation of Australia. At the same time, his inspiration is a source of empowerment to the survivors of the agenda of genocide which is being perpetuated against those who are born with the responsibility to care for this ancient country. He would often refer to his work as 'tucker for the people'. Having developed his art of the written word, he found photography a powerful and complementary expression capable of affirming the reality of which he spoke.

The slogan White Australia not a nation but a community of thieves was very much his theme for the years leading up to and including the 1988 Bicentenary. The use of Xavier Herbert's words, rather than his own, was Kevin's way of paying tribute to the author's contribution to Black Australia. The appeared on stickers, t-shirts, posters, and in books.

The spontaneous moment of pressing the shutter has encapsulated not only the resistance of oppression by living Black in this land and being confronted with the daily reality of the 'locked gate' syndrome and the constant threat of incarceration for lifestyle offences, but also the sheer
courage it takes for Aboriginal Nations and Peoples to confront the oppressor full on. The power of the image gains energy during these genocidal times of land theft on a continental scale, when the word extinguish is not far removed from exterminate; when the 'community of thieves' is hell-bent on compelling the custodians of the oldest culture in the world to conform to the ways of the invading culture.

Raising our sovereign flag was a particular favourite of Kevin's because it reflects the strength to be found in the unity of diversity. At the opening of new Parliament House in Canberra, representatives from Aboriginal Nations and Peoples from across this land confronted not only the 'seat of government', but also the Crown from which the genocide originates. The photograph was taken in the early morning after a march which began in darkness - a strategy by the 'minders' to minimise the impact on the international media? The 'minders' has also insisted the flags and banners be left behind, but this tactic failed. As the events of the day unfolded, the power of the Aboriginal spirit was evident to all.

Like a fragrance or hologram, a photograph can evoke the intangible atmosphere and the memory of the event. To those present it is no surprise that the official documentaries of the opening show only the entrance and left wing of the new Parliament House. The right wing was covered with the flags and banners of black, red and gold. It is also no surprise that there is no official soundtrack of the Queen's appearance at the entrance and her walk on the forecourt. Thousands of Kooris, Murris, Nungas, Yapa, Nyoongahs, Palawar, and Gooris from across the land were sitting in the hot sun on the gravel beneath the right wing for what was organised as a 'peaceful protest'. All Kevin had said to the manipulative organisers beforehand was, "You'll never silence the mob". His words proved prophetic. As soon as the Queen appeared in the entrance, 'the mob' rose in unison, turned away, and sustained the spontaneous chant: "Shame! Shame! Shame!" A supporter with army training asked later: "How did you do it? For all our army training we are never that coordinated". Perhaps the answer lies with the indomitable spirit of the land.

Kevin recorded a source of his inspiration in the catalogue to the 1988 group photographic exhibition Inside Black Australia: "... inspired by the need to communicate with the wider community the possibility in this great land; to begin developing a dialogue based on justice, so that ultimately we can begin to develop all people and encompass them in a code of spiritual being and national conduct, which not only reflects the
very essence of life itself and the ultimate continuum for Being, but also will enable us, upon attainment, to project that magnanimity of spirit throughout the world.” - Article by: Eleanor Williams, September 1998 -

Taken and Adapted From:

c. Alice Munro as a writer:

Nearly all of Alice Munro’s fiction is set in southwestern Ontario, but her reputation as a brilliant short-story writer goes far beyond the borders of her native Canada. Her accessible, moving stories offer immediate pleasures while simultaneously exploring human complexities in what appear to be effortless anecdotal re-creations of everyday life. In one novel and eight collections of stories she has established herself as a major voice among fiction writers.

Munro was born into a family of farmers on July 10, 1931, in the small rural town of Wingham, Ontario. She began writing in her teens. She published her first story in 1950 while a student at Western Ontario University, but she left school to marry and moved to British Columbia, where she had three children and helped her husband establish a bookstore. This marriage broke up in 1972 when she returned to Ontario, and she remarried in 1976. Her first collection of stories, Dance of the Happy Shades, was not published until 1968, but it was highly acclaimed and won that year’s Governor General’s Award, Canada’s highest literary prize. This success was followed by Lives of Girls and Women (1971), a collection of interlinked stories that was published as a novel and won the Canadian Booksellers Association International Book Year Award.

Her remaining seven books are all short story collections, two of which also won the Governor General’s Award in 1978 and 1986: Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You (1974); Who Do You Think You Are? (1978, titled The Beggar Maid in English and American editions); The Moons of Jupiter (1982); The Progress of Love (1986); Friend of My Youth (1990); Open Secrets (1994); and Selected Stories (1996). In addition, her stories are regularly printed in such publications as The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, Grand Street, Mademoiselle, and The Paris Review.

The subject matter of Munro’s stories has clearly developed from her own experience. She has explained in various interviews that her stories
are not autobiographical, but she does claim an "emotional reality" for her characters that is drawn from her own life. Munro's life experiences of growing up in a relatively poor provincial southwestern Ontario town during the depression, negotiating the rebelliousness and idealism of adolescence, discovering sex, leaving home, testing herself at university, falling in love, getting married, having children, getting divorced, making a living, and getting along in a variety of complicated relationships all inform the fiction she creates.

Her fictional world ranges across the breadth of Canada from Ontario to British Columbia, but most readers agree that her Ontario stories, rooted as they are in her own formative past, represent more evocative settings experienced in childhood and recollected by a perceptive adult memory. Many commentators compare Munro's interest in small-town settings to the use that American regional writers make of the rural South. Her characters, like Faulkner's or Flannery O'Connor's, often find themselves confronting entrenched customs and traditions, but their behavior is usually less overtly desperate and violently intense than that of their southern counterparts. To be sure there are drunk, suicides, molesters, lunatics, and bizarre eccentrics in Munro's stories, but Faulkner's Emily Grierson and Abner Snopes or O'Connor's Misfit represent more extreme character types than the more ordinary men and women who populate Munro's fictions.

In Lives of Girls and Women Munro has a character, Del Jordon, explain what she hopes to achieve in writing a work of fiction about small-town life in Ontario. Del works hard to portray not only what is actually "real" about the town, but what is meaningfully "true," and in order to do so she must capture the dull, ordinary simplicity of her neighbors' daily lives. Del's description of her efforts has often— and rightly — been used by critics to describe Munro's own intentions as a writer: "What I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together— radiant, everlasting." And that's really the point to be made about Munro's realistic technique: what is "everlasting," what is remembered and transformed into meaning, are details made "radiant," details that have been arranged and illuminated with meaning. Munro's stories are filled with glimpses of what she describes in "An Ounce of Cure" as the "shameless, marvelous, shattering absurdity" of life.
Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/literature/bedlit/authors_depth/munro.htm

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Kevin Gilbert's “Kiacatoo”:
1. Describe the incident as the great grandmother experienced it in the past; what does it mean to her now?
2. How do the later generations react to the incident at Kiacatoo? What do their different reactions signify?
3. Interpret the last line, “but can't silence the dreams of the proud.”

Alice Munro’s “Boys and Girls”:
1. Answer the three questions posed at the end of the story (p.1013).
2. Describe the rural setting of the story.
3. How has the experience of watching her father shoot the old horse changed the narrator’s view of her father?
4. Characterize the father.

Discussion Questions:

1. Research the history of race relations from the days of the British settlement in Australia as a penal colony. Comment on the issues that concern the native Australian writers today.
2. Research the role of women in Canadian societies, exploring the tensions created by conflicts between tradition and modernity.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS
UNIT 8

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM THE CARIBBEAN: 1

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of: effect of the political upheavals on people’s lives and thinking in Morejón’s work; racial discrimination in Cofer’s poem; and displacement and alienation in McKay’s work.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Imagery, politics and religion in “Central Park Some People (3 P.M.)”
2. Racism in “What the Gypsy Said to Her Children”
3. Alienation and displacement in “Outcast.”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Poems to Read

1. Nancy Morejón, “Central Park Some People (3 P.M.)”, Cuba

b. Nancy Morejón as a writer:

Nancy Morejón, one of the most distinguished poets of Cuba, was born in 1944 and grew up in an old neighbourhood of Havana, where the Spanish built their first settlement in the new world. Nancy Morejón is a poet of Havana and its people. Her published works include Mutismos (1962), Amor, ciudad atribulada (1964), Richard trajo se flauta (1967), Parajes de una época (1979), Octubre imprescindible (1983), Cuaderno de Granada (1984). The National Autonomous University of Mexico has published two volumes, Poemas (1980) and Elogio de la danza (1982). Critical works include Lenguaje de Pájaro (1971), Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén (1974), Nación y mestizaje en Nicolás Guillén (1980). Her work has been translated into many languages. She has also translated poetry by Paul Eluard, Jacques Roumain and Aimé Césaire. She studied Language and French Literature at the University of Havana.
Nancy Morejón visited Cape Town in 1992 and gave a number of readings and workshops.

Taken and Adapted From: http://www.uct.ac.za/projects/poetry/morejon.htm

b. Judith Ortiz Cofer as a writer:

Judith Ortiz Cofer (b. 1952) was born in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico, but moved to Paterson, New Jersey at the age of four when her father joined the navy and was assigned to a post at the Brooklyn Naval Yard. She received a B.A. from Augusta College and an M.A. from Florida Atlantic University. In graduate school Cofer started writing poetry about Latina women and the problems they faced. She began teaching in public schools and in 1980 published her first collection of poetry Latin Women Pray. Cofer branched out from poetry in the late 1980s by publishing the novel The Line of the Sun. (1989), which was nominated for the Pulitzer prize, and then a collection of personal essays, Silent Dancing: A Partial Rememberance of a Puerto Rican Childhood in 1990. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of Georgia.

Woman in Front of the Sun: On Becoming a Writer: In this collection of essays woven with poems and folklore, Judith Ortiz Cofer tells the story of how she became a poet and writer and explores her love of words, her discovery of the magic of language, and her struggle to carve out time to practice her art. A native of Puerto Rico, Cofer came to the mainland as a child. Torn between two cultures and two languages, she learned early the power of words and how to wield them. She discovered her love for the subtleties, sounds, and rhythms of the written word when a Roman Catholic nun and teacher bent on changing traditions for the better gave her books of high literature to read, some of which were forbidden by the church. Later, as an adult, demands from her family and her profession made it difficult for Cofer to find time to devote to her art, but her need and determination to express herself led to solutions that can help all artists challenged with the limits of time. Cofer recalls the family cuentos, or stories, that inspire her and shows how they speak to all artists, all women, all people. She encourages her readers to insist on the right to be themselves and to pursue their passions. A book that entertains, instructs, and entralls, Woman in Front of the Sun will be invaluable to students of poetry and creative nonfiction and will be a staple in every creative writing classroom as well as an inspiration to all those who write.
Taken and adapted from:

c. Claude McKay as a writer:

McKay, Claude (15 Sept. 1890-22 May 1948), poet, novelist, and journalist, was born Festus Claudius McKay in Sunny Ville, Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, the son of Thomas Francis McKay and Hannah Ann Elizabeth Edwards, farmers. The youngest of eleven children, McKay was sent at an early age to live with his oldest brother, a schoolteacher, so that he could be given the best education available. An avid reader, McKay began to write poetry at the age of ten. In 1906 he decided to enter a trade school, but when the school was destroyed by an earthquake he became apprenticed to a carriage and cabinet maker; a brief period in the constabulary followed. In 1907 McKay came to the attention of Walter Jekyll, an English gentleman residing in Jamaica who became his mentor, encouraging him to write dialect verse. Jekyll later set some of McKay's verse to music. By the time he immigrated to the United States in 1912, McKay had established himself as a poet, publishing two volumes of dialect verse, Songs of Jamaica (1912) and Constab Ballads (1912).

Having heard favorable reports of the work of Booker T. Washington, McKay enrolled at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama with the intention of studying agronomy; it was here that he first encountered the harsh realities of American racism, which would form the basis for much of his subsequent writing. He soon left Tuskegee for Kansas State College in Manhattan, Kansas. In 1914 a financial gift from Jekyll enabled him to move to New York, where he invested in a restaurant and married his childhood sweetheart, Eulalie Imelda Lewars. Neither venture lasted a year and Lewars returned to Jamaica to give birth to their daughter. McKay was forced to take a series of menial jobs. He was finally able to publish two poems, "Invocation" and "The Harlem Dancer," under a pseudonym in 1917. McKay's talent as a lyric poet earned him recognition, particularly from Frank Harris, editor of Pearson's magazine, and Max Eastman, editor of The Liberator, a socialist journal; both became instrumental in McKay's early career.

As a socialist, McKay eventually became an editor at The Liberator, in addition to writing various articles for a number of left-wing publications.
During the period of racial violence against blacks known as the Red Summer of 1919, McKay wrote one of his best-known poems, the sonnet, "If We Must Die," an anthem of resistance later quoted by Winston Churchill during World War II. "Baptism," "The White House," and "The Lynching," all sonnets, also exemplify some of McKay's finest protest poetry. The generation of poets who formed the core of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, identified McKay as a leading inspirational force, even though he did not write modern verse. His innovation lay in the directness with which he spoke of racial issues and his choice of the working class, rather than the middle class, as his focus.

McKay resided in England from 1919 through 1921, then returned to the United States. While in England, he was employed by the British socialist journal, Workers' Drednought, and published a book of verse, Spring in New Hampshire, which was released in an expanded version in the United States in 1922. The same year, Harlem Shadows, perhaps his most significant poetry collection, appeared. McKay then began a twelve-year sojourn through Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa, a period marked by poverty and illness. While in the Soviet Union he compiled his journalistic essays into a book, The Negros in America, which was not published in the United States until 1979. For a time he was bouyed by the success of his first published novel, Home to Harlem (1928), which was critically acclaimed but engendered controversy for its frank portrayal of the underside of Harlem life.

His next novel, Banjo: A Story without a Plot (1929), followed the exploits of an expatriate African-American musician in Marseilles, a locale McKay knew well. This novel and McKay's presence in France influenced Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and other pioneers of the Negritude literary movement that took hold in French West Africa and the West Indies. Banjo did not sell well. Neither did Gingertown (1932), a short story collection, or Banana Bottom (1933). Often identified as McKay's finest novel, Banana Bottom tells the story of Bita Plant, who returns to Jamaica after being educated in England and struggles to form an identity that reconciles the aesthetic values imposed upon her with her appreciation for her native roots.

McKay had moved to Morocco in 1930, but his financial situation forced him to return to the United States in 1934. He gained acceptance to the Federal Writers Project in 1936 and completed his autobiography, A Long Way from Home, in 1937. Although no longer sympathetic toward
communism, he remained a socialist, publishing essays and articles in The Nation, the New Leader, and the New York Amsterdam News. In 1940 McKay produced a nonfiction work, Harlem: Negro Metropolis, which gained little attention but has remained an important historical source. Never able to regain the stature he had achieved during the 1920s, McKay blamed his chronic financial difficulties on his race and his failure to obtain academic credentials and associations.

McKay never returned to the homeland he left in 1912. His became a U.S. citizen in 1940. High blood pressure and heart disease led to a steady physical decline, and in a move that surprised his friends, McKay abandoned his lifelong agnosticism and embraced Catholicism. In 1944 he left New York for Chicago, where he worked for the Catholic Youth Organization. He eventually succumbed to congestive heart failure in Chicago. His second autobiography, My Green Hills of Jamaica, was published posthumously in 1979.

Assessments of McKay's lasting influence vary. To McKay's contemporaries, such as James Weldon Johnson, "Claude McKay's poetry was one of the great forces in bringing about what is often called the 'Negro Literary Renaissance.'" While his novels and autobiographies have found an increasing audience in recent years, modern critics appear to concur with Arthur P. Davis that McKay's greatest literary contributions are found among his early sonnets and lyrics. McKay ended A Long Way from Home with this assessment of himself: "I have nothing to give but my singing. All my life I have been a troubadour wanderer, nourishing myself mainly on the poetry of existence. And all I offer here is the distilled poetry of my experience."


**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS**

Morejon’s “Central Park Some People (3 P.M.)”:

1. Explain the image of the recurring white light. What does it symbolize?
2. What is the connection between religion and the Cuban revolution as portrayed in the poem?
3. How does the poet blend imagery, politics, and religion to render a symbolic statement?

Coefer's "What the Gypsy Said To Her Children":

1. Why are the gypsies lamenting?
2. What images are used to describe the laments of the gypsies?
3. Why are the gypsies hated by people?

McKay's "Outcast":

Analysis of the poem by Heather A. Hathaway -

From the moment of his arrival in the United States in 1912, then, to the beginning of his twelve year excursion abroad in 1922, McKay struggled to find a place for himself in America. Many of the poems that he wrote during this period reflect a profound and distressing alienation from his adopted culture. His well-known poem "Outcast," perhaps most poignantly reveals the multitude of allegiances he sought, only to find himself in the end alone, "far from [his] native clime," out of place and "out of time." The first quatrain of this English sonnet expresses the speaker's desire to be a part of a rather mystical conception of Africa, "the dim regions whence [his] fathers came," where his "soul would sing forgotten jungle songs." Here, he would live in "darkness" and in "peace." But lines six through eight acknowledge that he is inescapably a product of the "western world" and will forever "bend [his] knee" to the "alien gods" that control it. The third quatrain explains, however, that this homage exacts a heavy toll:

Something in me is lost, forever lost,
Some vital thine has gone out of my heart,
And I must walk the way of life a ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart.

According to McKay, in succumbing to the "alien gods," the poem's speaker has lost part of an essential Blackness that is rooted in Africa. The ultimate tragedy comes when, realizing this loss, he also realizes the massive gulf that separates Black from White in the Western world and in the United States in particular, and thus realizes his suspensions in a racial no-man's land, unlinked to all others but himself. While McKay's
poem "Mulatto" laments a comparable, though more literal, suspension between White and Black worlds through the voice of a genetic Mulatto, "Outcast" reveals the poet's own self-perception as a cultural Mulatto. It depicts his rather romantic conceptions of Africa, and his self-determined inability to possess fully a type of essential Blackness because of his ineluctable attraction to and contact with the "White" aspects of Western culture. As he comments in A Long Way from Home, "My damned white education has robbed me of much of the primitive vitality, the pure stamina, the simple unswaggering strength of the Jakes [the urban vagabond in Home to Harlem (1928)] of the Negro race."

From Cultural Crossings: Migration, Generation, and Gender in Writings by Claude McKay and Paule Marshall. UMI-Ann Arbor, © 1993; order # 9412349.

Discussion Questions:
1. Research the history of Cuba in the 20th-21st century. Discuss the effect of the political upheavals on people's lives and thinking.
2. Research the issues of class and gender in the Caribbean context. Examine the same issues with regard to any other society that is familiar, commenting on the cultural underpinnings of each.
3. Research the issue of cultural and ideological bonding of the African diaspora with the motherland, Africa.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS

UNIT 9

POEMS & SHORT STORIES FROM THE CARIBBEAN: II

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of:
the themes of enculturation and the patriarchal oppression in Kincaid's
work and her feeling of differentness and rootedness

TOPICS COVERED

1. Cultural enforcement of female roles in "Girl"
2. Feelings of ambivalences (differentness and rootedness) in “I Used
to Live Here Once”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Short Stories to Read

1. Jamaica Kincaid, “Girl” (1190)
2. Jean Rhys, “I Used to Live Here Once” (708)

b. Jamaica Kincaid as a writer

Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 as Elaine Potter Richardson on the
island of Antigua. She lived with her stepfather, a carpenter, and her
mother until 1965 when she was sent to Westchester, New York to work
as an au pair. In Antigua, she completed her secondary education under
the British system due to Antigua's status as a British colony until 1967.
She went on to study photography at the New York School for Social
Research after leaving the family for which she worked, and also attended
Franconia College in New Hampshire for a year. Her first writing
experience involved a series of articles for Ingenue magazine. In 1973,
she changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid because her family
disapproved of her writing. Through her writing, she befriended George
W.S. Trow, a writer for the New Yorker, who began writing "Talk of the
Town" pieces about her. As a result, Kincaid met the editor of the
magazine, William Shawn, who offered her a job. Kincaid later married
Shawn's son, Allen, a composer and Bennington College professor, and they now have two children.

Jamaica Kincaid's Major Themes:

"I was always being told I should be something, and then my whole upbringing was something I was not: it was English" (Cudjoe 219).

"Antigua is a small place, a small island...It was settled by Christopher Columbus in 1493. Not too long after, it was settled by human rubbish from Europe, who used enslaved by noble and exalted human beings from Africa...to satisfy their desire for wealth and power, to feel better about their own miserable existence, so that they could be less lonely and empty- a European disease" (80-81).

Antigua became self-governing in 1967, but did not achieve the status of an independent nation within the Commonwealth until 1981. Within the structure of the British educational system imposed upon Antiguans, Kincaid grew to "detest everything about England, except the literature" (Vorda 79). She felt first-hand the negative effects of British colonialism as the colonists attempted to turn Antigua "into England" and the natives "into English" without regard for the native culture or homeland (Kincaid 24). The effects of colonialism serve as the major theme for A Small Place in which Kincaid expresses her anger both at the colonists and at the Antiguans for failing to fully achieve their independence. She feels that Antiguans failed to adopt the positive aspects of colonialism, for instance a good educational system which might help the population to better their lives. This inability to promote the importance of education and hope for the future is symbolized in the failure to rebuild Antigua's only library, St. John's, which was "damaged in the earthquake of 1974" and years later, still carries the sign "REPAIRS ARE PENDING" (Kincaid 9).

Although Kincaid has faced heavy criticism for her angry tone and simple writing style in A Small Place, she wears her anger like "a badge of courage," blaming her intimate connection to her homeland for creating "a sort of traumatic history" (Perry 132). In many ways, the identity Kincaid has developed is a result of English upbringing and the lack of a native culture due to colonialism, and "nothing can erase [her] rage...for this wrong can never be made right" (Kincaid 32). This rage provides the tone for this tract; as in other works, Kincaid's writing becomes an expression of herself.
In *A Small Place*, Kincaid calls attention to the fact that in many ways, conditions in Antigua worsened with the achievement of independence; she communicates her frustration with her people and capitalism. In a nation free from colonialism, Antiguans "do to [themselves] the very things [colonists] used to do to [them]" (Kincaid 36). Just as they have adopted the behaviors of colonialism, the natives have "absorbed" the event of tourism "so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own tourist attraction" (Kincaid 69). Through her critique of colonialism and the development of an exploitative tourist industry in *A Small Place*, Kincaid addresses several other major themes which include the influence of homeland on identity, culture, and the desire for independence.

In her other novels, Kincaid reflects on the influence of the mother-daughter relationship in shaping a female identity in a male-dominated society and explores the phenomenon of female bonding. Because colonialism involves politics and public life, often thought to be male spheres of influence, Kincaid's *Annie John, My Mother, and At the Bottom of the River* provide the opportunity to explore Kincaid's relationship with her mother as well as her development of identity in light of cultural expectations. *Lucy*, in turn, incorporates these cultural expectations and how they result in different interpretations of the same events. Kincaid also examines a mother's role in her daughter's socialization and explores the ideas of love, affection, hostility, death and their impact on self-discovery. In fact, in an interview with Kay Bonetti, Kincaid states that "I don't really write about men unless they have something to do with a woman." Kincaid often portrays sex as a tool of independence for women, adding another dimension to the feminist aspects of her writing.

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Kincaid.html

c. Jean Rhys as a writer:

She was born Ella Rees Williams to a Creole mother and a Welsh-born doctor in Roseau, on the Windward Island of Dominica. As a white girl in a predominantly black community, Rhys felt socially and intellectually isolated; in 1907 she left the island for schooling in England, returning only once, in 1936. Although Rhys's attitude to her birthplace remained ambivalent throughout her life, the Caribbean shaped her sensibility. She remained nostalgic for the emotional vitality of its black peoples, and the
conflict between its beauty and its violent history became enmeshed in the tensions of her own often-fraught personality.

Self-destructive and alcoholic, whose familiarity with the seedy side of life marked her work. Rhys called herself as "a doormat in a world of boots." Her fiction deals with the theme of the helpless female, victimized by her dependence on a man for support and protection. She is best known for *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a novel that gave voice to Edward Rochester's mad wife in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

"She found pleasure in memories, as an old woman might have done. Her mind was a confusion of memory and imagination. It was always places that she thought of, not people. She would lie thinking of the dark shadows of houses in a street white with sunshine; or trees with slender black branches and young green leaves, like the trees of a London square in spring; or of a dark-purple sea, the sea of a chromo or of some tropical country that she had never seen."
(from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, 1931)

Rhys's Creole heritage, her experiences as a white Creole woman, both in the Caribbean and in England, influenced deeply her life and writing. As a child she loved literature and longed to visit the places she read about. At the age of 17 her father sent her to England. She attended the Perse School, Cambridge (1907-08), and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London (1909). Rhys was forced to abandon her studies when her father died. She worked for a while as a chorus girl with a touring musical company and ghostwrote a book about furniture. She also received a small allowance from a former lover. During World War I she was a volunteer worker in soldiers canteen and in 1918 she worked in a pension office.

In 1919 Rhys went to Holland and married the French-Dutch journalist and songwriter Jean Langlet. In 1920-22 she lived with him in Vienna and Budapest, then in Paris, and after 1927 mainly in England. They had two children, a son who died in infancy and a daughter. Rhys began writing under the patronage of Ford Madox Ford, whom she met in Paris. At that time her husband was sentenced to prison for illegal financial transactions. Her affair with Ford ended with much bitterness. Rhys and her husband were divorced.
"The perpetual hunger to be beautiful and that thirst to be loved which is the real curse of Eve." (from 'Illusion' in The Left Bank, 1927)

When Europe was Rhys's home, the West Indies was a part of her literary consciousness and her feeling of differentness and rootedness marked her work. In 1927 Rhys published her first collection of stories, The Left Bank and Other Stories, taking the penname Jean Rhys. Her first novel, Quartet (1928), is a classical version of the fate of the innocent, helpless victim caught in a sexual game that she does not understand. The book is considered to be an account of Rhys's affair with Ford Madox Ford. It tells the story of Marya, a young English woman. Unemployed Marya meets and marries a Polish man who lives in Paris. While her husband is in prison she is seduced by a friend.

"I also was tired of learning and reciting poems in praise of daffodils, and my relations with the few 'real' English boys and girls I had met were awkward. I had discovered that if I called myself English they would snub me haughtily: 'You're not English; you're a horrid colonial.'" (from 'The Day They Burned the Books' in The Collected Short Stories of Jean Rhys, 1968)

The portrayal of the mistreated, unlucky woman characters continued in Rhys's following works. In Voyage in the Dark (1934) the young chorus girl gives herself in the hands of her older lover, has an abortion, and becomes the passive victim of other men and women. In Good Morning, Midnight (1939) Rhys used a modified stream-of-consciousness technique to portray the consciousness of an aging woman, Sasha Jensen. Sasha has returned to Paris, where she reviews her happiest and most desperate moments of life. "She must cry so that others may be able to laugh the more heartily." When she is picked up by a young man, she renews her relationship with the society outside.

From 1939 to 1957 Rhys dropped from public attention. She had married in 1934 Leslie Tilden Smith, who died in 1945. Two years later she married Max Hamer, who had served a prison term. He died in 1966. She lived for many years in the West Country, often in great poverty. In 1959 her novel Good Morning, Midnight was adapted by Vaz Dias for the BBC. Encouraged by Francis Wyndham, Rhys started to write again, and her short stories were published in the London Magazine and Art and Letters. Rhys continued to live alone in her primitive Devon cottage at Cheriton FitzPaine, drinking heavily but still writing.
Rhys gained international acclaim in the 1960s with the publication of her most admired novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It tells the story of the conflicting cultures in the character of Antoinette Bertha Cosway, a West Indian. She marries a constrained and domineering Englishman, Edward Rochester, and follows him to his home country. Like Bertha in Jane Eyre, she ends up confined in the attic of her husband's country house. Edward is a tormented character who admits that "she had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I had found it." Much of the action of the novel takes place in the West Indies. In her madness and misery Antoinette burns up the house and herself.

Rhys was made a CBE in 1978. Among her awards were W.H. Smith Award, the Royal Society of Literature Award and an Arts Council Bursary. She died on May 14, 1979, in Exeter. In the same year appeared her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please* (1979).

Taken and Adapted From: [http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/rhys.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/rhys.htm)

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS**

Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl":

1. Who is the speaker in the story?
2. It is said that "Girl" highlights Kincaid's evocative use of language, as she explores themes of enculturation and the "patriarchal politics of oppression". Here, a mother offers to her daughter a string of hypnotic, militaristic admonitions: "Wash the clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barefoot in the sun... soak salt fish overnight before you cook it... on Sundays try to walk like a lady, and not the slut you are so bent on becoming". Do you agree with this explanation? If so, why?
3. Could it be that the writer Kincaid draws upon the angst, isolation, and wonder of her own childhood in Antigua and a mother-daughter relationship?

Jean Rhys’ "I Used to Lived Here Once":

1. Attempt the two questions posed at the end of the story (p.709).
2. Describe the attitude of the two children toward the woman who went to visit her home town after a long time of living elsewhere.

Discussion Questions:

Examine the theme of alienation and displacement in any of the Caribbean immigrant writers in America.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS


UNIT 10

SHORT STORIES FROM AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND CHINESE-AMERICAN MINORITY

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of:
The poverty and backwardness of the working-class black in Walker’s fiction and mother-daughter relationship in Amy Tan’s work.

TOPICS COVERED

1. Poverty and resistance to changes in “Every day Use”
2. Mother-daughter relationship and adoption of American way of life in “Two Kinds”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Short Stories to Read

1. Alice Walker, “Everyday Use” (1149)
2. Amy Tan, “Two Kinds” (1208)

b. Alice Walker as a writer

Alice Malsenior Walker was born February 8, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. The youngest of eight children, her parents were sharecroppers and dairy farmers. From an early age she was introverted and quite shy, possibly a result of her temporary disfigurement and permanent blindness, a result of one of her brothers shooting her in the eye with a bb gun. She felt that she was ugly and scary to look at so she retreated into solitude, reading poems and stories then writing.

Walker graduated from high school as valedictorian, attended Spelman for a while, then transferred to Sarah Lawrence College where she graduated in 1965. She was involved with the civil rights movement in Mississippi where she lived for seven years. During that time she also got married to a lawyer and had her daughter Rebecca.

In 1967 she wrote The Third Life of Grange Copeland while on fellowship at MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. In 1973 she released a collection of short stories that dealt with the oppression, the
insanity's, the loyalties and triumphs of Black women. Love and Trouble won the American Academy and Institutes of Arts and Letters Rosenthal Award.

Between 1979 and 1982 she published several more works and it was her third novel, published in 1982 that established her as a major American writer. Walker used the nineteenth century tradition of women writing confidential letters to comfort one another in the face of physical and psychological abuse. The Color Purple remained on the New York Times bestsellers list for 25 weeks and claimed the American Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In the late 80's and early 90's she published several books. She has been instrumental in bringing about awareness of female genital mutilation, through writing, film and lecturing around the world.

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.sistahspace.com/sistory/writers/walker/index2.html

c. Amy Tan as a writer:

Amy Tan was born on February 19, 1952 in California. She grew up surrounded by influences from both Chinese and American cultures. She has written about trying to assimilate into the mainstream, American world as a child, often at the expense of her Chinese heritage. Tan's father and brother died of brain tumors when she was fourteen years old. At this time, she also learned that her mother had been married to a different man in China and had three daughters from this marriage, a situation not unlike June's in The Joy Luck Club, her first novel.

Tan attended high school in Switzerland and went to eight different colleges, ultimately receiving a master's degree in Linguistics from San Jose State University. Tan became a published author at the age of eight when she wrote an essay on the public library that was published in a local paper. Before The Joy Luck Club (for which she won the L.A. Book Award and The National Book Award) was published in 1989, Tan had a wide variety of jobs, everything from a bartender to a counselor for developmentally disabled children. She now lives in San Francisco with her husband Lou DeMattei, whom she married in 1975.

Amy Tan is part of a movement of Asian-American writers that includes Maxine Hong Kingston (The Woman Warrior) and Wakako Yamauchi (Songs My Mother Taught Me). A large part of Tan's contribution to the
modern Asian-American literary boom is her widespread popularity. The Joy Luck Club, aside from winning numerous awards, was a fixture on the best seller list and was made into a feature film, for which Tan helped to write the screen play. Tan's popularity helped expose an entire genre of literature to a broad cross section of society.

Tan's writing relies heavily on flashbacks, storytelling, and mysticism. In The Joy Luck Club, Tan starts each chapter with a short parable that is in some way a parallel with the woman whose story is being told in the chapter. This connection of the past and the present is typical of Tan's style.

Tan has said that her intention in writing is not to provide historical information, but rather to create a work of art. Her work is generally received in this manner. Critics have said that her works are not necessarily "Chinese" in nature, but are instead stories with universal themes (generational conflicts, war of the sexes, etc.) that have an added dimension of being told through narrators that are constantly searching for a balance between their Chinese heritage and American lifestyles.

Taken and Adapted From:
http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/AmyTan.html

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use”:

1. Attempt all the three questions posed at the end of the story (p. 1155).
2. Describe the living condition of Maggie and her mother. Why haven't their living condition improved over the years? Do they resist changes?
3. Characterize Dee or Miss Wangero.

Amy Tan’s “Two Kinds”:

1. Attempt all the five questions posed at the end of the story (p. 1215).
2. Describe the cross-cultural conflicts in the story between the Chinese mother and her daughter.
3. Do you think the narrator’s views of her mother has changed by the end of the story?
Discussion Questions:

Examine the theme of cross-cultural conflicts in the works of any one of the Chinese-American writers.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS


UNIT 11

SHORT STORY & DRAMA FROM AFRICAN-AMERICAN MINORITY

Content:

- Learning Objectives
- Topics Covered
- Learning Activities
- Self-Assessment Tasks
- Related Critical Works
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will have gained the understanding of:
The restrictions

TOPICS COVERED

1. Constraints of poverty and motherhood in “I Stand Here Ironing”
2. Black social condition in “Soul Gone Home”

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Short Story and Drama to Read

2. Hughes, “Soul Gone Home”, Black American

b. Tillie Olsen as a writer:

TILLIE OLSEN, the beloved fiction writer, is self-effacing in person. “I haven't published a lot of anything,” she says. And she's partly right. Her output has been relatively small. But she makes up for that in quality. Most famous for the short-story collection Tell Me a Riddle (Dell, 1961), Olsen has the ability to imply whole lives in a few sentences.

Here the speaker of “I Stand Here Ironing” looks back on the difficulties of young, single motherhood: “She was a miracle to me, but when she was eight months old I had to leave her daytimes with the woman downstairs to whom she was no miracle at all, for I worked or looked for work and for Emily's father, who "could no longer endure" (he wrote in his good-bye note) "sharing want with us."

"I was nineteen. It was the pre-relief, pre-WPA world of the depression. I would start running as soon as I got off the streetcar, running up the stairs, the place smelling sour, and awake or asleep to startle awake, when she saw me she would break into a clogged weeping that could not be comforted, a weeping I can hear yet."
Olsen says she was born in 1912 or 1913 in Omaha, Nebraska. Her parents were working class Russian Jewish immigrants and were deeply involved in the Socialist Party, which her father served as state secretary. Once, Eugene Victor Debs, head of the Socialist Party, came to Omaha in celebration of his release from prison (he was incarcerated for protesting World War I). Olsen and her sister presented him with red roses—an event she recalls fondly.

She showed early promise as a writer—part of what became her novel, Yomondio (about a working class family in the 1930s), was published in 1934 in Partisan Review to high praise. But she spent much of her life working full-time jobs and raising four children. Among other things, she was a pork trimmer in meatpacking houses, a hotel maid, a laundry worker, a jar capper, a waitress, and a soldierer.

In 1955, Olsen won a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University, which allowed her to do her first sustained writing in twenty years. She published Tell Me a Riddle when she was fifty. That book includes the much anthologized "I Stand Here Ironing" (a mother’s reflection on her daughter, raised during years of poverty and anxiety), "Oh Yes" (the story of a threatened friendship between two young girls, one white and one black, who are entering the stratified world of junior high school), "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" (the tale of a seaman and unionist who returns to San Francisco on a drunken binge and finds only cautious acceptance from his former comrades), and "Tell Me a Riddle" (the story of the death of a Russian Jewish immigrant and revolutionary). In 1974, after setting aside Yomondio for forty years, she finally revised and published it (Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence).

From personal experience, Olsen came to realize the obstacles in the way of many writers not born to luxury. "In the twenty years I bore and raised my children, usually had to work on a paid job as well, the simplest circumstances for creation did not exist," she writes in Silences (Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), her book on the economic and social reasons writers fail to produce, and why many do not come to writing at all. Here is her dedication to that book: "For our silenced people, century after century their beings consumed in the hard, everyday essential work of maintaining human life. Their art, which still they made—as their other contributions—anonymous; refused respect, recognition; lost."

An activist most of her life, Olsen was jailed twice: "First in Kansas City, winter '32." She was distributing leaflets to the meatpackers. The charge
was "making loud and unusual noises." There she "languished five or six weeks--no money for bail--and got pleurisy, then incipient TB," she writes in her essay "The '30s: A Vision of Fear and Hope" (Newsweek, 1994).

Her second arrest occurred just after the San Francisco General Strike in 1934. In response to the murders of several striking longshoremen, 100,000 marched down Market Street to protest. "No one spoke," wrote Olsen. "The only sound was the beat of our feet. Then came 'The Terror'--bloody crackdowns by vigilantes who, the police giving them the power to arrest, wrecked encampments and beat strikers and sympathizers."

At the time of the General Strike, Olsen was a single mother. She met Jack Olsen (a fellow Young Communist League member) that year and had three more children with him, marrying him in 1944 before he went off to war. They lived together until 1989, when he died.

Before our interview, Olsen and I ate lunch together at an Italian restaurant a few blocks from her home in Berkeley, California. After making sure the busboy got his own tip, she suggested we walk back the long way and took my arm firmly in hers.

Just before we reached her house, she pointed to a third-floor window. "That hat is always there," she said. I looked up. Visible in the window was the back side of a bureau mirror. A straw hat and a scarf were slung from the top. "Sometimes the scarf is gone," Olsen said. "And then it is back as though it never moved." We turned toward her house. "You have to ponder the little mysteries," she said.

Until about eight months ago, Olsen lived in St. Francis Square, a three-block, working class, multi-ethnic cooperative in San Francisco's Fillmore district. She now lives in a small house directly behind the home of her youngest daughter, Laurie. We sat on her sunny porch and--while hornets darted in and out of her open door--talked for several hours.

- BY ANNE-MARIE CUSAC -

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.progressive.org/amc1199.htm

c. Langston Hughes as a writer:
Langston Hughes began writing in high school, and even at this early age was developing the voice that made him famous. Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, but lived with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas until he was thirteen and then with his mother in Lincoln, Illinois and Cleveland, Ohio where he went to high school. Hughes's grandmother, Mary Sampson Patterson Leary Langston, was prominent in the African American community in Lawrence. Her first husband had died at Harper's Ferry fighting with John Brown; her second husband, Hughes's grandfather, was a prominent Kansas politician during Reconstruction. During the time Hughes lived with his grandmother, however, she was old and poor and unable to give Hughes the attention he needed. Besides, Hughes felt hurt by both his mother and his father, and was unable to understand why he was not allowed to live with either of them. These feelings of rejection caused him to grow up very insecure and unsure of himself.

When Hughes's grandmother died, his mother summoned him to her home in Lincoln, Illinois. Here, according to Hughes, he wrote his first verse and was named class poet of his eighth grade class. Hughes lived in Lincoln for only a year, however; when his step-father found work in Cleveland, Ohio, the rest of the family then followed him there. Soon his step-father and mother moved on, this time to Chicago, but Hughes stayed in Cleveland in order to finish high school. His writing talent was recognized by his high school teachers and classmates, and Hughes had his first pieces of verse published in the Central High Monthly, a sophisticated school magazine. Soon he was on the staff of the Monthly, and publishing in the magazine regularly. An English teacher introduced him to poets such as Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman, and these became Hughes' earliest influences. During the summer after Hughes's junior year in high school, his father reentered his life. James Hughes was living in Toluca, Mexico, and wanted his son to join him there. Hughes lived in Mexico for the summer but he did not get along with his father. This conflict, though painful, apparently contributed to Hughes's maturity. When Hughes returned to Cleveland to finish high school, his writing had also matured. Consequently, during his senior year of high school, Langston Hughes began writing poetry of distinction.

After graduating from high school, Hughes planned to return to Mexico to visit with his father, in order to try to convince him that he should pay for his son's college education at Columbia University in New York City. At Columbia, Hughes thought, he could get a college education but also begin his career as a writer. On his way to Mexico on the train, while
thinking about his past and his future, Hughes wrote the famous poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." After arriving in Mexico, the tension between Hughes and his father was strong. Hughes wanted to be a writer; his father wanted him to be an engineer. After Hughes sent some of his poetry to the Brownies Book and Crisis magazines and it was accepted, his father was impressed enough to agree to pay for a year at Columbia University.

Hughes entered Columbia University in the fall of 1921, a little more than a year after he had graduated from Central High School. He stayed in school there for only a year; meanwhile, he found Harlem. Hughes quickly became an integral part of the arts scene in Harlem, so much so that in many ways he defined the spirit of the age, from a literary point of view. The Big Sea, the first volume of his autobiography, provides such a crucial first-person account of the era and its key players that much of what we know about the Harlem Renaissance we know from Langston Hughes's point of view. Hughes began regularly publishing his work in the Crisis and Opportunity magazines. He got to know other writers of the time such as Countee Cullen, Claude McCay, W.E.B. DuBois, and James Weldon Johnson. When his poem "The Weary Blues" won first prize in the poetry section of the 1925 Opportunity magazine literary contest, Hughes's literary career was launched. His first volume of poetry, also titled The Weary Blues, appeared in 1926.

In Hughes's poetry, he uses the rhythms of African American music, particularly blues and jazz. This sets his poetry apart from that of other writers, and it allowed him to experiment with a very rhythmic free verse. Hughes's second volume of poetry, Fine Clothes to the Jew (1927), was not well received at the time of its publication because it was too experimental. Now, however, many critics believe the volume to be among Hughes's finest work.

Langston Hughes returned to school in 1926, this time to the historically black Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He was supported by a patron of the arts, a wealthy white woman in her seventies named Charlotte Osgood Mason. Mason directed Hughes's literary career, convincing him to write the novel Not Without Laughter; the two had a dispute in 1930, however, and the relationship came to an end. At this point in Hughes's life he turned to the political left and began to develop his interest in socialism. He published poetry in New Masses, a journal associated with the Communist Party, and in 1932 sailed to the Soviet Union with a group of young African Americans. Later in the 1930s, Hughes's primary
writing was for the theater. His drama about miscegenation and the South, "Mulatto", became the longest running Broadway play written by an African American until Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" (1958).

In 1942, during World War II, Hughes began writing a column for the African American newspaper, the Chicago Defender. In 1943 he introduced the character of Jesse B. Semple, or Simple, to his readers. This fictional everyman, while humorous, also allowed Hughes to discuss very serious racial issues. The Simple columns were also popular—and they ran for twenty years and were collected in several books.

Money was a nagging concern for Hughes throughout his life. While he managed to support himself as a writer, no small task, he was never financially secure. In 1947, however, through his work writing the lyrics for the Broadway musical "Street Scene," Hughes was finally able to earn enough money to purchase a house in Harlem, which had been his dream. He continued to write: "Montage of a Dream Deferred," one of his best known volumes of poetry, was published in 1951; and from that time until his death sixteen years later he wrote more than twenty additional works.

Langston Hughes was, in his later years, deemed the "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race," a title he encouraged. Hughes meant to represent the race in his writing and he was, perhaps, the most original of all African American poets. On May 22, 1967 Hughes died after having had abdominal surgery. His funeral, like his poetry, was all blues and jazz: the jazz pianist Randy Weston was called and asked to play for Hughes's funeral. Very little was said by way of eulogy, but the jazz and the blues were hot, and the final tribute to this writer so influenced by African American musical forms was fitting.

Taken and Adapted From:
http://www.ukans.edu/kansas/crossingboundaries/page6e1.html

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Tillie Olsen’s "I Stand Here Ironing":

1. Attempt all the four questions posed at the end of the story (p.834).
2. How has poverty become a constraint for the narrator who is a single mother?

Hughes' "Soul Gone Home":

1. Summary of the play: The son has just died, and his mother is at the side of the body weeping at the loss of her son. While she is weeping the boy calls out his mother's name. He had pennies covering his eyes to make sure his eyes stay shut. He starts talking to her about what a bad mother she was. She tried to defend her image of what their life and reality was. When the men from the morgue were coming to pick up the body, she quickly got him to lay down and put the pennies back on his eyes. They took him away as Mamma was wailing. She said she loved him. Would you characterize the tone of the play as comic, tragic, tragicomic, or something else? Explain your answer.

2. Hughes describes the mother as "loudly simulating grief." What does this imply about the relationship of the mother to her son? What might Hughes be implying in this stage direction about the black experience in America in general?

Discussion Questions:

Examine carefully the works of Tillie Olsen/Langston Hughes to reconstruct the oppressive social condition that she/he lived in.

RELATED CRITICAL WORKS


APPENDIX

ATTACHED POEMS FOR THE COURSE

Content:

- "AH MAH"
- "AN INTRODUCTION"
- "SONG OF WAR"
- "VETERANS DAY"
- "TELEPHONE CONVERSATION"
- "ARFAYE"
- "KICATOO"
- "CENTRAL PARK SOME PEOPLE (3 P.M.)"
- "WHAT THE GYPSY SAID TO HER CHILDREN"
- "OUTCAST"
AH MAH
Shirley Geok-lin Lim

Grandmother was smaller
than me at eight. Had she
been child forever?

Helpless, hopeless, chin sharp
as a knuckle, fan face
hardly half-opened, not a scrap

of fat anywhere, she tottered
in black silk, leaning on
handmaids, on two tortured
fins. At sixty, his sons all
married, grandfather bought her,
Soochow flower song girl.

Every bone in her feet
had been broken, bound tighter
than any neighbor’s sweet
daughter’s. ten toes and instep
curled inwards, yellow petals
of shysanthemum, wrapped

in gold cloth. He bought the young
face, small knobby breasts
he swore he’d not dress in sarong

of maternity. Each night
he held her feet in his palms,
like lotus in the tight
hollows of celestial lakes.
In his calloused flesh, her
weightless soles, cool and slack,
clenched in his stranger’s fever.

AN INTRODUCTION
Kamala Das

I don’t know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of the week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in Two, ream in one. Don’t write in English, they said, English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, Every one of you? Why not let me speak in Any language I like? The language I speak Becomes mine, its distortions, its queeresses All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest, It is as human as I am human, don’t You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the Incoherent mutterings of the blazing Funeral pyre. I was a child, and later they Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me But my sad woman-body felt so beaten. The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrunk Pitifully. Then ... I wore a shirt and my Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness. Dress in suria, be girl, Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. oh, Belong, cried the categorizers. Don’t sit On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows. Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to Choose a name, a role. Don’t play pretending games. Don’t play a schizophrenia or be a Nymphlo. Don’t cry embarrassingly loud when Jilted in love ... I met a man, loved him. Call Him not by any name, he is every man Who wants a woman, just as I am every Woman who seeks love. In him ... the hungry haste Of rivers, in me ... the ocean’s tireless Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone, The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and

1 Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), India’s first prime minister after she gained independence.
2 “Madhavikutty is the pseudonym I use when I write stories in Malayalam, the language spoken here in Kerala State” [Dars note].
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
I: in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

SONG OF WAR
Kofi Awoonor

I shall sleep in white calico;
War has come upon the sons of men
And I shall sleep in calico;
Let the boys go forward,
Kpili and his people should go forward;
Let the white man’s guns boom,
We are marching forward;
We all shall sleep in calico.

When we start, the ground shall shake;
The war is within our very huts;
Cowards should fall back
And live at home with the women;
They who go near our wives
While we are away in battle
Shall lose their calabashes when we come.

Where has it been heard before
That a snake has bitten a child
In front of its own mother;
The war is upon us
It is within our very huts
And the sons of men shall fight it
Let the white man’s guns boom
And its smoke cover us
We are fighting them to die.

We shall die on the battle field
We shall die at no other place,
Our guns shall die with us
And our sharp knives shall perish with us
We shall die on the battlefield.
VETERANS DAY
Ifeanyi Menkiti

And because somebody
tired a gun
at somebody else
at Sarajevo;
but more because
of a man named Darwin,
who said his daddy
was an ape,
and proved it in a book;

therefore did the nations
fight amongst themselves
to decide who was fittest to survive
and killed a few million people
among whom were Africans
conscripted to serve;

bloodied, that is, to prove a point
concerning civilization’s
monkey-mongering ways.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION
Wole Soyinka

The price seemed reasonable, location
indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. “Madam,” I warned,
‘I hate a wasted journey – I am African.’
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
“How dark?” ... I had not misheard .... “ARE YOU LIGHT
OR VERY DARK?” Button B. Button A. Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squealing tar. It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfoundment to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis-
‘ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?’ revelation came.
‘You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?’
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality, rapidly, wave-length adjusted.
I chose, 'West African sepia'—and as afterthought, 'Down in my passport.' Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, t'ill truthfulness changed her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. 'WHAT'S THAT?' conceding
'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'
'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, cause—
 Foolishly madam—by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black—One moment madam!' —sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears —'Madam,' I pleaded, 'wouldn’t you rather
See for yourself?'

ARFAYE
Mohamud S. Togane

Arfaye: the sweet-smelling one,
fattest Somali in the city of Mogadishu,
city without deodorants.
Everybody knows his nickname and the irony
that sweetness the truth. Nobody knows his real name.
I can see him now in my mind’s eye
in the middle of Main Street
in the flying sun
melting away
about to drown in his sweaty khaki uniform
flinging sweat away from his eyes
trying to direct a traffic of stubborn donkeys,
skittish camels (impatient drivers poking their behinds)
hauling grass and milk;
donkey-carts driven by heedless drivers
who claim the city belongs to their tribe and donkeys;
goats, sheep, and cattle on their way to the slaughter-house;
jay walkers, paraplegic beggars scuttling on all fours
(an American nicknamed them spidermen);
beeping Fiats and thunder-farting ancient trucks without mufflers.
Out of this medley sometimes a relief would appear:
quivering ripe breasts of a careless bushwoman
or some undulating stout pygmy behind
then Arfaye would pause, tilt his head in worshipful wonder,
flash a smile, and throw darts of desire.
KIACATOO
Kevin Gilbert

On the banks of the Lachlan they caught us
at a place called Kiacatoo
we gathered by campfires at sunset
when we heard the death-cry of curlew
women gathered the children around them
men reached for their nulla and spear
the curlew again gave the warning
of footsteps of death drawing near
Barjoola whirled high in the firelight
and casting his spear screamed out “Run!”
his body scorched quickly on embers
knocked down by the shot of a gun
the screaming curlew’s piercing whistle
was drowned by the thunder of shot
men women and child fell in mid-flight
and a voice shouted “We’ve bagged the lot”
and singly the shots echoed later
to quieten each body that stirred
above the gurgling and bleeding
a nervous man’s laugh could be heard
“They’re cunning this lot, guard the river”
they shot until all swimmers sank
but they didn’t see Djarmail’s family
hide in the lee of the bank
Djarmail warned “Stay quiet or perish
they’re cutting us down like wild dogs
put reeds in your mouth – underwater
we’ll float out of here under logs”
a shot cracked and splintered the timber
the young girl Kalara clutched breath
she later became my great grandma
and told the story of my people’s death
The Yoongur bird cries by that place now
no big fish will swim in that hole
my people pass by that place quickly
in fear with quivering soul
at night when the white ones are sleeping
content in their modern day dreams
we hurry past Kiacatoo
where we still hear shuddering screams
you say “Sing me no songs of past history
let us no further discuss”
but the question remains still unanswered
How can you deny us like Pilate
refusing the rights due to us.
The land is now all allocated
the Crown’s common seal is a shroud

to cover the land thefts the murder

but can’t silence the dreams

CENTRAL PARK SOME PEOPLE (3 P.M.)

Nancy Morejon

he who crosses a park in great and flourishing Havana

amidst a flood of blinding white light

a white and blinding light

which would have driven that Van Gogh’s sunflower mad

that blinding white light

which fills the Chinese eyes of the Chinese street photographers

he who crosses a park and doesn’t understand

that blinding white light that almost repeats itself

he who is at loss at that time of day

takes all kinds of roundabout and unnecessary

sojourns around Havana’s Central Park

he who crosses a park strewn with sacred trees

who walks through it with open yet closed eyes

loving the Revolution’s impact on the eyes

the impact he felt I his eyes and waist

he who is sustained by that light might know about the night and the wine

because in parks and in this one so central the one in Havana

old men sit on benches

light cigars look at each other

and talk about the Revolution and Fidel

the old men who now remain on the benches

and are forever basking in the sun

it is a secret to no one

there go two men and an old worn-out briefcase

a fat bloated hand a shout wearing a grey hat

the old men meet next to the statue

do the Apostle Marti in 1966 in December 1966

the year nearly over and waiting for

‘the anniversary of freedom and paying tribute to the martyrs’

yes for all the men of the people who dies and their blood

to bask in the afternoon sun in Havana Cuba free territory of America

he who crosses the park this world the womb of the Revolution in this

manner

must sigh and walk slowly and breathe

and step lightly and sigh and breathe and walk slowly

and forfeit his whole life

rabidly

companeros

Translated by Sylvia Carranza
WHAT THE GYPSY SAID TO HER CHILDREN
Judith Ortiz Cofer

We are like the dead
invisible to those who do not
want to see,
and color is our only protection against
the killing silence of their eyes,
the crimson of our tents pitched
like a scream
in the fields of our foes,
the amber warmth of our fires
where we gather to lift our voices
in the purple lament of our songs,
And beyond the scope of their senses
where all colors blend into one
we will build our cities of light,
we will carve them
out of the granite of their hatreds,
with our own brown hands.

OUTCAST
Claude McKay

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
My spirit, bondages by the body, longs.
Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
I would go back to darkness and to peace,
But the great western world holds me in fee,
And I may never hope for full release
While to its alien gods I bend my knee.
Something in me is lost, forever lost,
Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
And I must walk the way of life a ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart.

For I was born, far from my native clime,
Under the white man’s menace, out of time.
Jeannette as she is bouncing on the trampoline. “You’ll tear your insides loose!” Jeannette starts thinking about that, and the idea is so horrifying she stops jumping so much. That night, she has a nightmare about the trampoline. In her dream, she is jumping on soft moss, and then it turns into a springy pile of dead bodies.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Donald tell his “Big Bertha stories”? What function do they serve in his life?
2. How does Jeannette think and feel about her husband? Would she have gotten divorced sooner had she been financially independent?
3. There are many references to strip-mining in the story. And Donald himself makes reference to his work saying, “I’m reclaiming the land.” What symbolic significance might these references have?
4. Toward the end of the story, Jeannette says about Donald, “Something’s missing, . . . Something happened to him once and took out the part that shows how much he cares about us.” What is she referring to? What in Donald’s behavior makes her reach this conclusion?

Bharati Mukherjee

HINDUS

I ran into Pat at Sushi’s on a Friday morning two years ago. Derek and I had gone to view the Fraser Collection of Islamic miniatures at the York Avenue galleries. It bothered Derek that I knew so little about my heritage. Islam is nothing more than a marauder’s faith to me, but the Mogul emperors stayed a long time in the green delta of the Ganges, flattening and re flattening a fort in the village where I was born, and forcing my priestly ancestors to prove themselves brave. Evidence on that score is still inconclusive. That village is now in Bangladesh.

Derek was a filmmaker, lightly employed at that time. We had been married three hundred and thirty-one days.

“So,” Pat said, in his flashy, plummy, drawn-out intonation, “you finally made it to the States.”

It was one of those early November mornings when the woody smell of overheated bodies in cloth coats clogged the public stairwells. Everywhere around me I detected the plaintive signs of over-preparedness.

“What are you doing here?” He engulfed me in a swirl of Liberty scarf and cashmere lapels.
"Trying to get the woman there to sell me the right catalog," I said.

The woman, a very young thing with slippery skin, was a lusty Granny Smith apple and ignored the dark, hesitant miniature-lovers hanging about like bars in daytime.

"They have more class in London," Pat said.

"I wouldn't know. I haven't been back since that unfortunate year at Roedean," "It was always New York you wanted," Pat laughed. "Don't say I didn't warn you. The world is full of empty promises."

I didn't remember his having warned me about life and the inevitability of grief. It was entirely possible that he had—he had always been given to clowning pronouncement—but I had not seen him in nine years and in Calcutta he had never really broken through the fortifications of my shyness.

"Come have a drink with me," Pat said.

It was my turn to laugh. "You must meet Derek," I said.

Derek had learned a great deal about India. He could reel off statistics of Panchayati Raj and the electrification of villages and the introduction of mass media, though he reserved his love for birds migrating through the wintry deserts of Jaisalmer. Knowledge of India made Derek more sympathetic than bitter, a common trait of decent outsiders.

He was charmed by Pat's heedless, old-world insularity.

"Is this the lucky man?" he said to Derek. He did not hold out his hand. He waved us outside; a taxi magically appeared. "Come have a drink with me tomorrow. At my place."

He gave Derek his card. It was big and would not fit into a wallet made to hold Visa and American Express. Derek read it with his usual curiosity.

H.R.H. Maharajah Patwant Singh of Godall Purveyor and Exporter

He tucked the card in the pocket of his raincoat. "I'll be shooting in Toronto tomorrow," he said, "but I'm sure Leela would like to keep it."

There was, in the retention of those final "it's"—even Indian maps and newspapers now referred to Godall and to maharajas, and I had dropped the old "Leela" in my first month in America—something of the exclusive mountebank. "I'm going to the Patels for dinner tomorrow," I said, afraid that Pat would misread the signs of healthy unsentimentality in our marriage.

"Come for a drink before. What's the matter, Leela? Turning a prude in your old age?" To Derek he explained, "I used to rock her on my knee when she was four. She was gorgeous then, but I am no lecher."

It is true that I was very pretty at four and that Pat spent a lot of time in our house finding us children. He brought us imported chocolates in beautiful tins and made a show of giving me the biggest. In my family, in every generation, one infant seems destined to be the repository of the family's comeliness. In my generation, I inherited the looks, like an heirloom, to keep in good condition and pass on to the next. Beauty
teaches humility and responsibility in the culture I came from. By marrying well, I could have seen to the education of my poorer cousins.

Pat was in a third floor sublet in Gramercy Park South. A West Indian doorman with pendulous cheeks and an unbuttoned jacket let me into the building. He didn't give me a chance to say where I was going as I moved toward the elevator.

"The Maharaja is third floor, to the right. All the way down." I had misunderstood the invitation. It was not to be an hour of wit and nostalgia among exotic knick-knacks squirreled into New York from the Gota Palace. I counted thirty guests in the first quarter hour of my short stay. Plump young men in tight-fitting suits scuttled from living room to kitchen, balancing overfull glasses of gin and tonic. The women were mostly blonde, with hardly mascaraed, brooding eyes, blonde the way South Americans are blonde, with deep residual shading. I tried to edge into a group of three women. One of them said, "I thought India was spellbinding. Naresh's partner managed to get us into the Lake Palace Hotel."

"I don't think I could take the poverty," said her friend, as I retreated.

The living room walls were hung with prints of British East India Company officials at work and play, the vestibule with mirror-images of Hindu gods and goddesses.

"Take my advice," a Gujarati man said to Pat in the dim and countless kitchen. "Get out of diamonds—emeralds aren't bottom out. These days it has to be rubies and emeralds."

In my six years in Manhattan I had not entered a kitchen without plants. There was not even a strangely avocado pushing its nerveous way out of a shrivelling seed.

I moved back into the living room where the smell of stale turmeric hung like yellow fog from the ceiling. A man rose from the brocade-covered cushions of a banquette near me and plumped them, smiling, to make room for me.

"You're Pat's niece, no?" The man was francophone, a Lebanese. "Pat has such pretty nieces. You have just come from Bombay? I love Bombay. Personally, Bombay to me is like a jewel. Like Paris, like Beirut before, now like Bombay. You agree?"

I disclaimed all kinship to H.R.H. I was a Bengali Brahmin: maharajas—not to put too sharp a point on it—were frankly beneath me, by at least one caste, though some of them, like Pat, would dispute it. Before my marriage to Derek so on in my family similiar initial eruption from Visits's knee had broken caste etiquette. I disclaimed any recent connection with India. "I haven't been home in ages," I told the Lebanese.

"I am an American citizen."

"I too am. I am American," he practically squealed. He rinsed his glass with a bit of gin still left in the bottom, as though he were trying to dislodge lemon pulp stuck and drying on its sides. "You want to have dinner with me tonight, yes? I know Lebanese places, secret and intimate. Food and ambience very romantic."

"She's going to the Patch." It was Pat. The Gujarati with advice on emeralds was still lodged in the kitchen, huddling with a stocky blonde in a fuschia silk sari.

"Oh, the Patch," said the Lebanese. "You did not say. Super guy, no? He's doing all right for himself. Not as well as me, of course. I own ten stores and he only has four."

Why, I often asked myself, was Derek never around to share these intimacies? Derek would have drawn out the suave, French-speaking, soulful side of this Seventh Avenue shnattite.
It shouldn’t have surprised me that the Lebanese man in the ruffled shirt should have known Mohan and Mottelin Patel. For immigrants in similar trades, Manhattan is still a village. Mohan had been in the States for eighteen years and last year had become a citizen. They’d been fortunate in having only sons, now at Cal Tech and Cornell; with daughters there would have been pressure on them to return to India for a proper arranged marriage.

"Is he still in Queens?" I asked.

"No," I told him. "They've moved to a biggish old place on Central Park West." "Very foolish move," said the Lebanese. "They will only spend their money now." He seemed genuinely appalled.

Pat looked at me surprised. "I can't believe it," he exclaimed. "Leela Lahiri actually going cromstown at night by herself. I remember when your Daddy wouldn’t let you walk the two blocks from school to the house without that armed Nepali, what was his name, dogging your steps."

"Guluseng," I said. "He was run over by a lorry three years ago. I think his name was really something—or-other-Rana, but he never corrected us."

"Short, nasty and brutal," said Pat. "They don't come that polite and loyal these days. Just as likely to slit your throat as anyone else, these days."

The Lebanese, sensing the end of brave New World overtures, the gathering of the darknesses we shared, drifted away.

"The country's changed totally, you know," Pat continued. "Crude rustic types have taken over. The ghemisadis, you know what I mean, they would wrap themselves in leinuchoa if it got them more votes. No integrity, no finesse. The country's gone to the dogs, I tell you."

"That whole life's outmoded, Pat. Obsolete. All over the world."

"They tried to put me in jail," he said. His face was small with bitterness and alarm. "They didn't like my politics, I tell you. Those Communists back home arrested me and threw me in jail. Me. Like a common criminal."

"On what charge?"

"Smuggling. For selling family heirlooms to Americans who understand them. No one at home understands their value. Here, I can sell off a little Pahari painting for ten thousand dollars. Americans understand our things better than we do ourselves. India wants me to starve in my overgrown palace."

"Did you really spend a night in jail?" I couldn't believe that modernization had finally come to India and that even there, no one was immune from consequences.

"Three nights," he fumed. "Like a common thief. The country has no respect anymore. The country has nothing. It has driven us abroad with whatever assets we could salvage."

"You did well, I take it." I did not share his perspective; I did not feel my country owed me anything. Comfort, perhaps, when I was there; a different comfort when I left it. India teaches her children: you have seen the worst. Now go out and don’t be afraid.

"I have nothing," he spat. "They've stripped me of everything. At night I hear the jackals sing in the courtyard of my palace."

But he had recovered by the time I left for the cromstown cab ride to the Patels. I saw him sitting on the banquette where not too long before the Lebanese had invited me to share an evening of unwholesomeness. On his knee he balanced, a tall, silver-haired
woman who looked like Candice Bergen. She wore a pink cashmere sweater which she must have put through the washing machine. Creases, like worms, curled around her sweatered bosom.

I didn’t see Pat for another two years. In those two years I did see a man who claimed to have bounced the real Candice Bergen on his knee. He had been a juggler at one time, had worked with Edgar Bergen on some vaudeville act and could still pull off card tricks and walk on his hands up and down my dining table. I kept the dining table when Derek and I split last May. He went back to Canada which we both realized too late he should never have left and the table was too massive to move out of our West 11th Street place and into his downtown Toronto, chic renovated apartment. Pat the ex-juggler is my boss at a publishing house. My job is menial but I have a soothing title. I am called an Administrative Assistant.

In the two years I have tried to treat the city not as an island of dark immigrants but as a vast sea in which new Americans like myself could disappear and resurface at will. I did not avoid Indians, but without Derek’s urging for me to be proud of my heritage, I did not seek them out. The Pathis did invite me to large dinners where all the guests seemed to know with the first flick of their eyes in my direction that I had married a white man and was now separated, and there our friendships hit rock. I was a curiosity, a novel and daring element in the community; everyone knew my name. After a while I began to say I was busy; to Mubehn Patel.

Pat came to the office with my boss, Bill Haines, the other day. “I wanted you to meet one of our new authors, Leela,” Bill said.

“Leela, dar-ling!” Pat cried. His voice was shrill with enthusiasm, and he pressed me histrionically against his Burberry raincoat. I could feel a button tap my collarbone. “It’s been years! Where have you been hiding your gorgeous self?”

“I didn’t realize you two knew each other,” Bill said.

All Indians in America, I could have told him, constitute a village.

“Her father bailed me out when the Indian government sought to persecute me,” he said with a pout. “If it hadn’t been for courageous friends like her daddy, I and my poor subjects might just as well have kicked the bucket.”

“She’s told me nothing about India,” said Bill Haines. “No accent, Western clothes—”

“Yes, a shame, that. By the way, Leela, I just found a picture of Lahiri-adeeb on an elephant when I was going through my official papers for Bill. If you come over for drinks—after getting out of those ridiculous clothes, I must insist—I can give it to you. Lahiri-adeeb looks like Ernest Hemingway in that photo. You tell him I said he looks like Hemingway.”

“Daddy’s in Ranthambhore this month,” I said. “He’s been bedridden for a while. Arthritis. He’s just beginning to move around a bit again.”

“I have hundreds of good anecdotes, Bill, about her Daddy and me doing shots in the Sundarban forest. Absolutely huge Bengal tigers. I want to balance the politics—which as you rightly say are central—with some stirring bits about what it was like in the good old days.”
“What are you writing?” I asked.

“I thought you’d never ask, my dear. My memoirs. At night I leave a Sony by my bed. Night is the best time for remembering. I hear the old sounds and voices. You remember, Leela, how the palace ballroom used to hum with dancing feet on my birthdays?”

“Memoirs of a Modern Maharanj,” Bill Haines said.

“I seem to remember the singing of jackals,” I said, not unkindly, though he chose to ignore it.

“Writing is what keeps me from going through death’s gate. There are nights . . .”

He didn’t finish. His posture had suffered with self-regard: he communicated great oceans of anguish. He’d probably do well. It was what people wanted to hear.

“The indignities,” he said suddenly. “The aspicides. He stared straight ahead, at a watercooler. “The nights in jail, the lice, the tans snuffling outside your barred window. I will never forget their smell, never! It is the smell of death, Leela. The new powers that be are peasants. Peasants! They cannot know, they cannot suspect how they have made me suffer. The country is in the hands of tyrannical peasants.”

“Look, Pat,” Bill Haines said, leading the writer toward his office, “I have to see Bob Savage, the sub-rights man one floor down. Make yourself at home. Just pull down any book you want to read. I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Don’t worry about me. I shall be all right, Bill. I have my Sony in my pocket. I shall just sit in a corner beside the daughter of my oldest friend, this child I used to bounce on my knee, and I shall let my mind slip into the nooks and crannies of Godal Palace. Did I tell you, when I was a young lad my mother kept pet crocs? Big, huge gents and ladies with ugly jaws full of nasty teeth. They were her pests. She gave them names and fed them chickens every day. Come to me, Padma. Come to me, Prem.”

“I’ll be dynamite,” Bill Haines said. “The whole project’s dynamite.” He pressed my hand as he eased his stubby, muscular body past the stack of dossiers on my desk.

“And you’ll be a godsend in developing this project.”

“And what’s with you?” Pat asked me. I could tell he already knew the essentials.

“Nothing much.” But he wasn’t listening anyway.

“You remember the thief my security men caught in the early days of your father’s setting up a factory in my hills? You remember how the mob got excited and poured acid on his face?”

I remembered. Was the Sony recording it? Was the memory an illustration of swift and righteous justice in a collapsed Himalayan princely state, or was it the savage and disproportionate fury of a people resisting change?

“Yes, certainly I do. Can I get you a cup of coffee or tea?” That, of course, was an important part of my job.

“No thanks,” he said with a flutter of his wrinkled hands. “I have given up all stimulants. I’ve even given up bed-tea. It interferes with my writing. Writing is everything to me nowadays. It has been my nirvana.”

“The book sounds dynamite,” I assured him. An Indian woman is brought up to please. No matter how passionately we link bodies with our new countries, we never escape the early days.

Pat dropped his voice, and, stooping conspiratorially, said to me in Hindi, “There’s
one big favor you can do for me, though. Bill has spoken of a chap I should be knowing.

Who is this Edgar Bergen?"

"I think he was the father of a movie actress," I said. I, too, had gone through
the same convulsion of recognition with Bill Haines. Fortunately, like most Americans, he
could not conceive of a world in which Edgar Bergen had no currency. Again in Hindi,
Pat asked me for directions to the facilities, and this time I could give a full response.
He left his rolled-slim umbrella propped against my desk and walked toward the
fountain.

"Is he really a maharaja?" Lisa leaned over from her desk to ask me. She is from
Rhode Island. Brown hasn't cured her of responding too enthusiastically to each call or
visit from a literary personage. "He's terrific. So suave and distinguished! Have you
known him from way back when?"

"Yes," I said, all the way from when.

"I had no idea you spoke Hindi. It's eerie to think you can speak such a hard
language. I'm having trouble enough with French. I keep forgetting that you haven't
lived here always."

I kept forgetting it too. I was about to correct her silly mistake—I'd learned from
Derek to be easily incensed over ignorant confusions between Hindi and Hindu—but
then I thought, why bother? Maybe she's right. That slight undetectable error, call it
an accent, isn't part of language at all. I speak Hindi. No matter what language I speak
it will come out slightly foreign, no matter how perfectly I mouth it. There's a whole
world of us now, speaking Hindi.

The manuscript of Memoirs was not dynamite, but I stayed up all night to finish it. In
spite of the arch locations and the aggrieved postures that Pat had stubbornly clung to,
I knew I was reading about myself, blind and groping conquistador who had come to
the New World too late.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the attitude the narrator has toward India with that of Pat.
   How do they differ? How are they alike?
2. How would you characterize the narrator's personality and values?
3. The story is divided into two parts. What is the purpose of this division? What
   changes has the narrator undergone during the time dividing them? What changes
   has Pat undergone?
4. In the last line of the story, the narrator says she is a "blind and groping conquistador
   who had come to the New World too late." What does she mean by this? What
   behaviors or actions does she show in the story that reflect this description?
Ramu's mother waited till he was halfway through dinner and then introduced the subject of marriage. Ramu merely replied, "So you are at it again?" He appeared more amused than angry, and so she brought out her favourite points one by one: her brother's daughter was getting on to fourteen, the girl was good-looking and her brother was prepared to give a handsome dowry; she (Ramu's mother) was getting old and wanted a holiday from housekeeping; she might die any moment and then who would cook Ramu's food and look after him? And the most indisputable argument: a man's luck changed with marriage. "The harvest depends not on the hand that holds the plough but on the hand which holds the pot." Earlier in the evening Ramu's mother had decided that if he refused again or exhibited the usual sullenness at the mention of marriage, she would leave him to his fate; she would leave him absolutely alone even if she saw him falling down before a coming train. She would never more interfere in his affairs. She realized what a resolute mind she possessed, and felt proud of the fact. That was the kind of person one ought to be. It was all very well having a mother's heart and so on, but even a mother could have a limit to her feelings. If Ramu thought he could do what he pleased just because she was only a mother, she would show him he was mistaken. If he was going to slight her judgement and feelings, she was going to show how indifferent she herself could be.

With so much preparation she broached the subject of marriage and presented a formidable array of reasons. But Ramu just brushed them aside and spoke slightly of the appearance of her brother's daughter. And then she announced, "This is the last time I am speaking about this. Hereafter I will leave you alone. Even if I see you drowning I will never ask why you are drowning. Do you understand?"

"Yes." Ramu brooded. He could not get through his Intermediate even at the fourth attempt; he could not get a job, even at twenty rupees a month. And here was Mother worrying him to marry. Of all girls, his uncle's! That protruding tooth alone would put off any man. It was incredible that he should be expected to marry that girl. He had always felt that when he married he would marry a girl like Rekha, whom he had seen in two or three Hindi films. Life was rusty and sterile, and Ramu lived in a stage of perpetual melancholia and depression; he loafed away his time, or slept, or read old newspapers in a free reading room.

He now sat before his dining leaf and brooded. His mother watched him for a moment and said, "I hate your face. I hate anyone who sits before his leaf with that face. A woman only ten days old in widowhood would put on a more cheerful look."

"You are saying all sorts of things because I refuse to marry your brother's daughter," he replied.

"What do I care? She is a fortunate girl and will get a really decent husband." Ramu's mother hated him for his sullenness. It was the gloomy look that she hated in people. It was unbearable. She spoke for a few minutes, and he asked, "When are you going to shut up?"
“My life is nearly over,” said the mother. “You will see me shutting up once and for all very soon. Don’t be impatient. You ask me to shut up! Has it come to this?”

“Well, I only asked you to give me some time to eat.”

“Oh, yes. You will have it soon, my boy. When I am gone you will have plenty of time, my boy.”

Ramu did not reply. He ate his food in silence. “I only want you to look a little more human when you eat,” she said.

“How is it possible with this food?” asked Ramu.

“What do you say?” screamed the mother. “If you are so fidgety, work and earn like all men. Throw down the money and demand what you want. Don’t command when you are a pauper.”

When the meal was over, Ramu was seen putting on his sandals. “Where are you going?” asked the mother.

“Going out,” he curtly replied, and walked out, leaving the street door ajar.

Her duties for the day were over. She had scrubbed the floor of the kitchen, washed the vessels and put them in a shining row on the wooden shelf, returned the short scrubbing broom to its corner and closed the kitchen window.

Taking the lantern and closing the kitchen door, she came to the front room. The street door stood ajar. She became indignant at her son’s carelessness. The boy was indifferent and irresponsible and didn’t feel bound even to shut the street door. Here she was wearing out her palm scrubbing the floor night after night. Why should she slave if he was indifferent? He was old enough to realize his responsibilities in life.

She took out her small wooden box and put into her mouth a clove, a cardamom and a piece of areca nut. Chewing these, she felt more at peace with life. She shut the door without bolting it and lay down to sleep.

Where could Ramu have gone? She began to feel uneasy. She rolled her mat, went out, spread it on the jārū and lay down. She muttered to herself the holy name of Śrī Rama in order to keep out disturbing thoughts. She went on whispering, “Śita Rama Rama . . .” But the words came unconsciously. Her thoughts returned to Ramu. What did he say before going out? “I am just going out for a stroll, Mother. Don’t worry. I shall be back soon.” No, it was not that. Not he. Why was the boy so secretive about his movements? That was impudent and exasperating. But, she told herself, she deserved no better treatment with that terrible temper and cutting tongue of hers. There was no doubt that she had conducted herself abominably during the meal. All her life this had been her worst failing; this tendency, while in a temper, to talk without restraint. She even felt that her husband would have lived for a few more years if she had spoken to him less . . . Ramu had said something about the food. She would include more vegetables and cook better from tomorrow. Poor boy . . .

She fell asleep. Somewhere a gong sounded once, and she woke up. One o’clock? She called, “Ramu, Ramu.”

She did not dare to contemplate what he might have done with himself. Gradually, she came to believe that her words during the meal had driven him to suicide. She sat up and wept. She was working herself up to a hysterical pitch. When she closed her eyes to press out the gathering tears, the vision of her son’s body floating in Kukunnahalli Tank came before her. His striped shirt and mill dhoó were sodden and clung close to
his body. His sandals were left on one of the tank steps. His face was bloated beyond all recognition.

She screamed aloud and jumped down from the parapet. She ran along the whole length of Old Agra Bazaar Street. It was deserted. Electric lights twinkled here and there. Far away an auto-rickshaw was rattling on, the auto-driver's song faintly disturbing the silence: the blast of a night constable's whistle came to her ears, and she stopped running. She realized that after all it might be only her imagination. He might have gone away to the drama, which didn't usually close before three in the morning. She rapidly uttered the holy name of Sri Rama in order to prevent the picture of Kukanahalli Tank coming before her mind.

She had a restless night. Unknown to herself, she slept in snatches and woke up with a start every time the gong boomed. The gong struck six through the chill morning. Tears streaming down her face, she started for Kukanahalli Tank. Mysore was just waking to fresh life. Milkmen with slow cows passed along. Municipal sweepers were busy with their long brooms. One or two cycles passed her.

She reached the tank, not daring even once to look at the water. She found him sleeping one of the benches that lined the bund. For just a second she wondered if it might be his corpse. She shook him vigorously, crying "Ramu!" She heaved a tremendous sigh of relief when he stirred.

He sat up, rubbing his eyes. "Why are you here, Mother?"

"What a place to sleep in!"

"Oh, I just fell asleep," he said.

"Come home," she said. She walked on and he followed her. She saw him going down the tank steps. "Where are you going?"

"Just for a wash," Ramu explained.

She clung to his arm and said vehemently, "No, don't go near the water."

He obeyed her, though he was slightly baffled by her vehemence.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the lives of Ramu and his mother in this story. Where do they live? What are their social and economic backgrounds? What cultural implications about family life and marriage are advanced?

2. Explain the author's handling of time as a structuring or plotting device in the story.

3. How might the last sentence predict whether or not Ramu will marry his first cousin?
Langston Hughes

SOUL GONE HOME

CHARACTERS

THE MOTHER
THE SON
TWO MEN

Night.
A stovetop room, hot, ugly, dirty. An unshaded electric-light bulb. In the
middle of the room a cot on which the body of a Negro youth is lying. His hands
are folded across his chest. There are pennies on his eyes. He is a soul gone home.
As the curtain rises, his mother, a large, middle-aged woman in a red
sweater, stands weeping beside the cot, loudly lamenting grief.

MOTHER: Oh, Gawd! Oh Lawd! Why did you take my son from me? Oh, Gawd, why
did you do it? He was all I had! Oh, Gawd, what am I gonna do? [Looking at the dead
boy and stroking his head.] Oh, son! Oh, Ronnie! Oh, my boy, speak to me! Ronnie, say
something to me! Son, why don’t you talk to your mother? Can’t you see she’s bowed
down in sorrow? Son, speak to me, just a word! Come back from the spirit-world and
speak to me! Ronnie, come back from the dead and speak to your mother!
SON [lying there dead as a doormat, speaking loudly]: I wish I wasn’t dead, so I could speak
to you. You been a hell of a mama!
MOTHER [falling back from the cot in astonishment, but still on her knees]: Ronnie! Ronnie!
What’s that you say? What you sayin’ to your mother? [Wild-eyed] Is you done
opened your mouth and spoke to me?
SON: I said you a hell of a mama!
MOTHER [rising suddenly and backing away, screaming loudly]: Awo-o-o- Ronnie, that ain’t
you talkin’?
SON: Yes, it me talkin’, too! I say you been a no-good mama.
MOTHER: What for you talkin’ to me like that, Ronnie? You ain’t never said nothin’
like that to me before.
SON: I know it, but I’m dead now—and I can say what I want to say. [Shivering.] You
done called on me to talk, ain’t you? Lemme take these pennies off my eyes so I can
see. [He takes the coins off his eyes, throws them across the room, and sits up in bed. He is a very
dark boy in a torn white shirt. He looks hard at his mother.] Mamma, you know you ain’t done
me right.
MOTHER: What you mean, I ain’t done you right? [She is rooted in horror.] What you
mean, huh?
SON: You know what I mean.
MOTHER: No, I don’t neither. [Trembling violently.] What you mean comin’ back to
haunt your poor old mother? Ronnie, what does you mean?
SON: [muttering to himself]: I'll tell you just what I mean! You been a bad mother to me.
MOTHER: Shame! Shame! Shame! Talkin' to your mama that way. Damn it! Shame!
I'll slap your face. [She slaps him, but he rolls his big white eyes at her, and she backs away.] Me, what borned you? Me, what suffered the pains o' death to bring you into this world? Me, what raised you up, what washed your dirty dirty? [Sternly.] And now I'm left here might'n' high prostrate 'cause you gone from me! Ronnie, what you mean talkin' to me like that—what brought you into this world?
SON: You never did feed me good, that's what I mean! Who wants to come into the world hungry, and go out the same way?
MOTHER: What you mean hungry? When I had money, ain't I fed you?
SON: [muttering]: Most of the time you ain't had no money.
MOTHER: Twasn't my fault then.
SON: Twasn't my fault neither.
MOTHER [defensively]: You always was so weak and sickly, you couldn't earn nothin', sellin' papers.
SON: I know it.
MOTHER: You never was no use to me.
SON: So you just lemme grow up in the street, and I ain't had no manners nor morals, neither.
MOTHER: Manners and morals? Ronnie, where'd you learn all them big words?
SON: I learnt 'em just now in the spirit-world.
MOTHER [sneering]: But you ain't been dead no more'n an hour.
SON: That's long enough to learn a lot.
MOTHER: Well, what else did you find out?
SON: I found out you was a hell of a mama puttin' me out in the cold to sell papers soon as I could even walk.
MOTHER: What? You little liar!
SON: If I'm lyin', I'm dyin'! And lettin' me grow up all bowlegged and stunted from undernourishment.
MOTHER: Under-nurse-mint?
SON: Undernourishment. You heard what the doctor said last week?
MOTHER: Naw, what'd he say?
SON: He said I was dyin' o' undernourishment, that's what he said. He said I had TB 'cause I didn't have enough to eat never when I was a child. And he said I couldn't get well, nohow eatin' nothin' but beans ever since I been sick. Said I needed milk and eggs. And you said you ain't got no money for milk and eggs, which I know you ain't. [Gently] We never had no money, mama, not even since you took up hustlin' on the streets.
MOTHER: Son, money ain't everything.
SON: Naw, but when you got TB you have to have milk and eggs.
MOTHER [advancing unimportantly]: Aw, how, I love you, Ronnie!
SON [nervously]: Sure you love me—but here I am dead.
MOTHER [angrily]: Well, damn your hide, you ain't even decent dead. If you was, you wouldn't be sittin' there jawin' at your mother when she's shakin' every tear she's got for you tonight.
SON: First time you ever did cry for me, far as I know.
MOTHER: Tain’! You’s a li’l’! I cried when I horned you—you was such a big child—ten pounds.
SON: Then I did the cryin’ after that, I reckon.
MOTHER [proudly]: Sure. I could of let you die, but I didn’t. Now, I kept you with me—off and on. And I lost the chance to marry many a good man, too—if it weren’t for you. No man wants to take care o’ nobody else’s child. [Self-pitying:] You been a burden to me, Randolph.
SON [angry]: What did you have me for then, in the first place?
MOTHER: How could I help havin’ you, you little bastard? Your father ruined me—and you’s the result. And I been worried with you for sixteen years. [Disgusted:] Now, just when you get big enough to work and do me some good, you have to go and die.
SON: I sure am dead!
MOTHER: But you ain’t decent dead! Here you come back to haunt your poor old mama, and spoil her cryin’ spell, and spoil the mournin’. [There is the noise of an ambulance going outside. The mother goes to the window and looks down into the street. Turns to son.] Ronnie, lay down quick! Here comes the city’s ambulance to take you to the undertaker’s. Don’t let them white men see you dead, sitting up here quarrelin’ with your mother. Lay down and fold your hands back like I had ‘em.
SON [passing his hand across his head]: All right, but gimme that comb yonder and my stocking cap. I don’t want to go out of here with my hair standin’ straight up in front, even if I is dead. [The mother hands him a comb and his stocking cap. The son combs his hair and puts the cap on. Noise of men coming up the stairs.]
MOTHER: Hurry up, Ronnie, they’ll be here in no time.
SON: Aw, they got another flight to come yet. Don’t rush me, ma!
MOTHER: Yes, but I got to put these pennies back on your eyes, boy! [She searches in a corner for the coins as her son lies down and folds his hands, stiff in death. She finds the coins and puts them nervously on his eyes, watching the door meanwhile. A knock.] Come in.

[Enter two men in the white coats of city health officers.]

MAN: Somebody sent us to get the body of Ronnie Bailey? Third floor, apartment five.
MOTHER: Yes, sir, here he is! [Weeping loudly.] He’s my boy! Oh, Lawd, he’s done left me! Oh, Lawd, he’s done gone home! His soul’s gone home! Oh, what am I gonna do? Mister! Mister! Mister, the Lawd’s done took him home! [As the men unfold the stretchers, she continues to weep hysterically. They place the boy’s thin body on the stretchers and cover it with a rubber cloth. Each man takes his end of the stretchers. Silently, they walk out the door as the mother wails.] Oh, my son! Oh, my boy! Come back, come back, come back! Ronnie, come back! [One loud scream as the door shuts.] Awo-000-o!
MOTHER: Tomorrow, Ronnie, I'll buy you some flowers—if I can pick up a dollar tonight. You were a hell of a no-good son, I swear.

Curtain.

QUESTIONS

1. Would you characterize the tone of the play as comic, tragic, tragicomic, or something else? Explain your answer.
2. Hughes describes the mother as "loudly simulating grief." What does this imply about the relationship of the mother to her son? What might Hughes be implying in this stage direction about the black experience in America in general?
3. The son makes the ironic remark that "I'm dead now—and I can say what I want to say." What does he mean by this? Find other ironies in the characters' actions and statements, and explain their meaning.
5. Hughes stated that he was a "propaganda writer: my main material is the race problem." How is his statement connected to the theme of Soul Gone Home?
6. Compare and contrast the themes of Riders to the Sea and Soul Gone Home.